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Editorial

Education and Human Bonds

Zuzana Svobodová

"It's difficult to tell the truth, since there is only one truth,
but that truth is alive
and therefore has lively, changing face"
Franz Kafka to Milena, on June 23, 1920

"...even though truth is of course singular ...,
nevertheless it expresses itself – as truth – in life entirely differently,
and even differently on the stage"[1]
"The order of Being has many facets"
Václav Havel to Olga, on May 1, 1981

Questions of theology and philosophy are as old as those about education. The former may even be more recent compared to formation as activity to mold someone according to the imagined shape. However, where the activity involves more than formation and discipline, where education stems from the critical reflection of our incapability and incapacity more than from power and strength, there is shared understanding, i.e., culture, in which one connects to values and virtues in a service to common good.

Both labor and work could be complemented by action, as Hannah Arendt recommended to us thanks to her reflections of Aristotle's *Politics* and on the times of crisis she lived in. Games and plays have been with humans from the time we can speak about culture, because "culture itself bears the character of play" as Johan Huizinga (1950, ix)[2] described.

Once we stop asking for rules of a game, instruction manuals, methodology guidelines, once we start asking new questions that start not with the word *how*, but *why*, it is then that we start living as human beings who experience freedom. Freedom that allows people to live in a humanly manner even if they are imprisoned. Freedom which no imposed system, political

[1] Havel 1961: 3. The typical repetition of the same sentences in one and the same theatre play by Václav Havel should prompt the audience to see what are the differences between truth and information. Havel expressed the same principle in one of his letters to Olga: "... history has adequately demonstrated that the more people who succumb to the illusion that truth is a commodity that may readily be passed on, the greater the horrors that follow ..."(Havel 1989: 224 – letter number 92, from September 6, 1981).

[2] This is what Huizinga explained in the foreword to his *Homo ludens*: https://archive.org/details/homoludensstudyo1950huiz/page/n15/mode/2up.

or other, can take away and which can thrive in the life of people who live asking questions of *why*, for the rest of their days. If, eventually, the ancient question of *why is there something and not nothing* (cf. DK B 6[3]) comes to be posed, one has arrived at the spring and source. Their thirst will not be quenched fully, for they will keep asking this question, but at least they know that they need this source, and they will be willing to care for this life-giving spring till the end. Of course, we can always return to games, labor and work, and a long time of our lives can be spent in them, however the otherness of our relation to the world as a whole, which was aroused by the question of *why*, will have already made our relation to the world a cosmic one (Havel 1989: 230), even if we lived in a prison cell.

This brings us to an equally important question: What is a human person really after? What are we really after?

In *Theology and Philosophy of Education* we want to ask these questions. Those who ask questions not only on methods but also on the goals that affect us as human beings will be able to find in this journal a platform for their publications.

Theology, in its questions concerning human life, relates to the One whom we call theos in Greek, to God. Theology seeks its answers in a reflection on faith as a relationship of belief to God, and it does so also on the basis of other, earlier, written and unwritten reflections, often based on the reflection on the text perceived as sacred, i.e., inspired by God, and also on what is called tradition. Since the term theology is commonly associated with the three Abrahamic religions, i.e., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, it is not difficult to understand which sacred texts and traditions associated with them are most often the focus of such reflections. What are these sacred texts really about? What is the driving force of those who link their lives to a reflection of faith? And should it somehow be of interest to those who have not linked their lives with the reflection of what or whom they believe?

In the 21st century, many universities no longer have a faculty associated with the term theology. Instead, however, one may find a faculty associated with the term “divinity”. Let’s consider the difference between what theology and divinity stand for. Surely there will be differences. The journal *Theology and Philosophy of Education* was founded at a time when this state of affairs was already quite evident in universities and in various scholarly and library databases (even there, the term theology is often no longer present). Nevertheless, in our e-journal, we have decided to reflect on theology of education more explicitly than religious education (while, on the other hand, as practiced in primary and secondary schools, religious education is paradoxically more specific). We are well aware that the two areas are interlinked. However, we are also aware of the limitations of both these areas, i.e., theology of education and religious education, and the related approaches. That is why we have introduced the term theology in the title of our journal. We want to develop a critical dialogue on our platform about the issues that also arise when thinking about the differences between these approaches.

By using the term theology in the title of our scientific journal we have indicated that we are not afraid of dialogue and that we are not afraid of using terms that are not popular with a part

[3] Parmenides’ words can be seen as a response to this question.

of the wider academic community. We have done so precisely because we wish to advance academic reflection, refraining from merely benefitting from its solely pragmatic undertones. Having taken that avenue, we do not favor regressive attitudes that would oppose new approaches. Instead, we seek to critically examine our human bonds – even those to what is not always called *theos*, but to which human beings deeply subject themselves in acts of service. We want to reflect, cultivate, think about, care for those bonds. We committed ourselves to the mission of cultivating and caring from the very first issue of the inaugural volume. For this reason, education is a key word for us, this is why we are committed to developing theology as a theology of education and philosophy as a philosophy of education. It is because we are convinced that theology is theology only insofar as it is also education and philosophy is philosophy only insofar as it is also education, i.e., the cultivation of the human personality.

In the 21st century, many universities no longer require all students to take even a basic introduction to philosophy (cf. Nussbaum 2017, 30). While it is still possible to study philosophy in universities, it is often a matter of applying philosophical inquiry to a pre-defined area of practice. It might even seem that this is also the case with our journal. It might seem that here, philosophy is linked to pedagogy as the science of education. It might seem that here, philosophy is linked with didactics understood as the science of artificial instruction. (Comenius 1967)[4] In our journal, however, we use the term philosophy of education to refer to the *why* of all pedagogy, didactics and education.

If we look at the current output of academic publications in philosophy, arguably, we will soon notice that today, many an author of a philosophical text is often not even familiar with the basics of theology. It goes without saying that this has a significant impact on the content of philosophical writings. Although a number of existing societies are described (not only by sociologists of religion) as (not only religiously) indifferent (Gn 4:9b; cf., e.g., Havel 1978: 4 – Danaher & Williams 2023, 280f; Zvěřina 1981, 34; Halík 1995, 122; 2008; 2021, 19; Kryl 2012; Quack & Schuh 2017; Loffeld 2020; 2024), a philosophy that fails to engage with the fruits of theology, developed over millennia (to only stay with the previously mentioned Abrahamic religions), undermines its own credibility. For when a philosopher ignores, for example, the theological tradition reflecting on the concepts of truth, being, time, essence, existence or person, they are often under the impression, in their own reflections, that they are formulating certain insights anew.

Precisely because today's university students and scholars live in a climate of religious indifference, their critical reflection should not ignore what is grown, what has thrived, what is about to sprout, flourish, and what has borne fruit in this climate as well as that what had caused it. This brings us to the need for collaboration with other scientific disciplines – for example, quite a few natural scientists or economists would probably understand such care better in the current climate. Interdisciplinarity is certainly nothing new. However, it is not only necessary for obtaining prestigious grants. Above all, it is needed to establish a common language among scientists – a precondition for critically sharing the outcomes of scientific work (cf. Tillich

[4] The first sentence of *The Great Didactic* by Comenius (1592–1670) reads as follows;: "Didactic signifies the art of teaching." (http://core.roehampton.ac.uk/digital/froarc/comgre/part2/pgs5-7.pdf)

1952, 70–73). For example, one can start by asking whether we all in the scientific community do indeed relate to truth? Is it possible at all to start with a relationship to the pursuit of truth that takes the form of an open question? (Picht 1969, 317) I am confident that such questions about our human bonds are pertinent not only to philosophy.

We are convinced that the development, cultivation, education of oneself and others is precisely the activity (not just labor or work) by which human beings fulfil their humanity. Even though there are people who are not explicitly, critically, in a reflective manner related to God or truth and most people today will not find it necessary for their lives to reflect on what or whom they believe, cultivation of humanity concerns everyone. If human life is still possible only as a life in relationships, then the cultivation of these relationships or bonds concerns the basis of life as a human life.

Not only the question of *how*, but also the question of *why* our humanity, which is always relational, should be cultivated shines through in the article *Creative Love in Education: Integrating traditional and critical theological approaches*, authored by Pinhas Luzon. Hans Mendl reflects on the current situation in the field of religious education in Germany, including challenges and opportunities, in the following article. *A Response to the Signs of the Times* in the form of *Religious and Cultural Mediation* is offered by Mária Spišiaková in the third article. Karel Sládek reflects *Leadership Styles and their Influence on Ethical Behaviour in the Education of Healthcare Professionals*. Mutual connections between inspiration, feeling and thinking clarifies Bert Meeuwsen in his article *Worldviews, Virtues, and Education* as continuity and deeper development of meaning-oriented reflections. In her *Framework for Aesthetic Appreciation in Addressing Global Challenges Within and Beyond Art Education* Samanta Viziale concentrates on *Unity-in-diversity*. Roland Urbain opens with his text *Ethics at the Heart of Teaching in Higher Education* a new format of papers in our journal, which we have called “discussion.”

Dear readers of *Theology and Philosophy of Education*, thank you for your reflective co-existence and I wish you valuable inspirations from the first issue of the fourth volume,

Zuzana Svobodová

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Creative Love in Education
Integrating traditional and critical theological approaches

Pinhas Luzon

Abstract
This article examines the integration of theology and critical thought to develop educational love capable of generating transmissible values. Drawing on Rabbi Nachman of Breslov's philosophy, it argues that expanding apophatic theology through critical thinking can form a transformative educational framework. This love emerges from recognizing human consciousness limitations, fostering a reciprocal teacher-student dynamic. The analysis reveals that acknowledging boundaries paradoxically creates a relationship where mutual recognition transcends preliminary ideologies. Creative Love in Education offers practical applications for classroom environments that honor both individual potential and communal values.

Keywords
Critical educational theology; Creative Love in Education; teacher-student relationship; apophatic theology; values; autonomy; infinity paradox; experience of limitation; distinctness; interdependence; participation; responsibility

Introduction

Can theology and critical thinking be merged to produce an educational love that provides positive, implementable, and transmissible values?[1] Current theoretical models in education emphasize the importance of love,[2] with some approaches suggesting teachers should love students as they are or could be, without establishing preliminary conditions (Jasinski and Lewis 2016, 430–32). This article explores whether educational love can simultaneously embrace students' potential while transmitting values that enable them to become loving themselves.

The question emerges from a fundamental tension in educational philosophy. Traditional theological approaches to education often impose predetermined values, potentially limiting student autonomy. Conversely, critical approaches may reject all fixed values, creating difficulties in transmitting any enduring principles. The resulting divide between theological

[1] On the unique characteristics of theological thinking and critical thinking that make it difficult to create integration between them in a way that produces transmissible educational values, see: Apple 2018: 3–4, Benyamini and Hotam 2015: 334–36, McLaren and Jandrić 2017: 632–35.

[2] On the place of love in education, its characteristics, and the challenges in implementing it within educational systems, see: Garrison 2010: 124–35, Kenklies 2019: 550–52, Lanas 2017, 560–62.

and critical worldviews manifests in educational contexts where neither approach fully succeeds in balancing unconditional acceptance with value transmission.[3] Traditional theological approaches risk constraining student autonomy by imposing predetermined values, while critical approaches may struggle to transmit any enduring principles, creating an educational vacuum where meaningful value formation becomes impossible.

This research offers a constructive response to this tension through a model I call Creative Love in Education. This love emerges from a philosophical framework – Critical Educational Theology (CET) – that merges elements of theological thinking with critical perspectives. Drawing significantly from the teachings of Rabbi Nachman of Breslav, CET establishes a foundation where both theology and criticism contribute to a cohesive educational philosophy (Luzon 2023b, 100–105).

The model presented here offers a solution to a core paradox: how can educators love students unconditionally while simultaneously imparting transformative values? By examining this question through the lens of expanded apophatic theology, I demonstrate how recognition of **the limitations of human knowledge** creates space for an educational relationship that transcends this paradox. This relationship, Creative Love in Education (whose defining characteristics will be outlined below), enables both unconditional regard for students and the transmission of values without contradiction. As will be elaborated below, this transformative love emerges through a specific process wherein mutual recognition of limitations creates reciprocal dependency, establishing a relationship where each participant's distinct existence depends upon the other's presence.

Critical Educational Theology: Theoretical Foundations

Critical Educational Theology is a philosophical worldview examining human relationships with both environment and divinity. Though fundamentally theological, it incorporates critical thinking principles and yields significant educational-moral implications. The framework combines theology and criticism through three interrelated principles that resolve the apparent conflict between these modes of thought.

The first principle – philosophical-critical – asserts that human knowledge is inherently limited, bounded by that which has no boundary: the infinite. Human consciousness must recognize its inability to appropriate absolute capabilities or knowledge. This principle represents the critical foundation, challenging any human claim to absolute authority or knowledge that would justify oppression (Luzon 2023b, 100–105).

The second principle – theological – maintains that God is unattainable and cannot be grasped directly. However, humans can perceive divine existence through regressive inference. When confronting the boundary between finite human knowledge and infinity, a paradox emerges: infinity itself appears limited by finite human existence. This "infinity paradox" leads to

[3] In his writings, Yotam Hotam extensively presents the gap between theological and critical thinking, while elaborating on the factors that led to the creation of this divide. From there, one can also learn about the way in which remnants of theological thinking still remain in the 'folds' of critical thought. See: Hotam 2023, 28–45. Hotam 2024: 200–202.

recognition of an incomprehensible entity – God – that transcends both finite and infinite categories (Luzon 2023a, 14–17).

The third principle – reconstruction – focuses on how every encounter with reality reconstructs the processes described in the previous principles. Each manifestation in reality serves as a boundary to human knowledge, stimulating consciousness to recognize its limitations and, through inductive thinking, to rediscover both infinity and God's unattainable nature. Thus, each encounter with reality reminds humans of their distinct, limited existence, separate from infinity and differentiated from God.[4]

At the educational-moral level, these principles establish a framework where the educator must create norms aligned with human knowledge's encounters with reality. These norms serve to reconstruct the process by which reality stimulates consciousness to rediscover its limitations and God's existence. The supreme educational value becomes transmitting knowledge regarding the limitations of human knowledge – not as nihilistic resignation but as authentic recognition of humanity's position in relation to the incomprehensible (Luzon 2023b, 107–109).

This theological-critical synthesis resolves a fundamental tension: rather than abandoning all supreme moral systems (which paradoxically assumes absolute knowledge about morality's absence), it establishes one supreme morality based on recognizing the impossibility of humans knowing what is absolutely good. This formulation aligns with CET's requirements by establishing clear moral values that promote discovering human knowledge's limitations through direct encounters with reality.

Creative Love in Education: A Conceptual Framework

Creative Love in Education emerges directly from Critical Educational Theology's principles, manifesting when two individuals encounter each other as mutual boundaries. In this encounter, each person's consciousness reconstructs the fundamental experience of limitation and, through this, experiences distinct self-existence. The other person thus serves as the catalyst for one's consciousness of unique existence. Without this encounter, this particular awareness would not exist (Luzon 2023a, 18–19).

This creates a remarkable dynamic: each person's distinct existence depends upon the other's presence. Neither threatens the other's existence; rather, each constitutes the other's conscious experience of distinctness. This mutual dependency establishes a relationship system where each participant experiences their unique existence as dependent on the other, creating a reciprocal appreciation that transcends mere acknowledgment to become love.

In the educational context, this means the teacher recognizes that the student's existence 'creates' the teacher's consciousness of distinct existence. This recognition engenders a desire to preserve the student as they are – not just in their current state but as they could be or choose

[4] On the fundamental and unique distinction between God in His essence and His manifestation within divine infinity, one can learn from the writings of Rabbi Nachman of Breslav. See: Nachman of Breslav, Likutei Moharan, 24:8.

not to be. Similarly, the student experiences the teacher as constituting their distinct existence, establishing mutual recognition beyond hierarchical power dynamics.

Crucially, this love differs from relationships where one party imposes predetermined values. Neither teacher nor student begins with absolute knowledge or values to impose. Instead, both recognize their limited nature and mutual dependency. Even the value of loving the other emerges secondarily from this mutual recognition rather than as a predetermined condition. When both acknowledge their limitations and interdependence, the student functions simultaneously as beloved and lover, rather than as merely the recipient of the teacher's affection (Luzon 2023a, 18–19).

Within this relationship, educational values emerge from reconstructing reality's stimulation of consciousness. The teacher does not abandon values but derives them from the need to reconstruct the consciousness that produced this love. The encounter with the student requires educational practices whose purpose is to reconstruct how the student created the teacher's consciousness of unique existence, and vice versa. This resolves the paradox of educational love: the teacher can love the student as they could be without relinquishing educational values, as these values emerge from and preserve the love relationship itself (Luzon 2023b, 105–15).

Practical Applications and Educational Values

The practical implications of Creative Love in Education extend throughout educational practice. Regarding the teacher's role, this approach positions educators as guides in a joint investigation about human consciousness and knowledge boundaries. This reframes lesson planning and management, encouraging learning spaces based on authentic encounters, open dialogue, and reflective observation of learning processes.

In assessment and feedback, Creative Love in Education nurtures a climate of mutual respect acknowledging all participants' limitations. It transforms the educational environment from one focused on hierarchical knowledge transmission to one inviting questioning and joint exploration. These principles can permeate pedagogical culture through implementation in teacher training programs (Luzon 2023b, 110–20).

The model translates into specific classroom behaviors and practices. Teachers can cultivate epistemic humility by presenting themselves as co-investigators rather than all-knowing authorities, using phrases like "let us explore together" instead of "I will explain to you," sharing their own learning experiences, and establishing "wondering corners" for unanswered questions. They can develop constitutive mutual responsibility through peer mentoring systems and cooperative projects emphasizing interdependence.

Teachers can establish direct discourse about personal knowledge boundaries, creating frameworks where students pursue answers to questions the teacher cannot answer and where teachers learn from students. They can preserve student autonomy by adapting teaching methods to individual needs and creating opportunities for expressing disagreement. Lessons can evolve through student-teacher interaction, with predetermined plans modified in response to student contributions.

At a deeper level, Creative Love in Education produces values that can be systematically implemented. One such value, *Renewed Artistic Humility*, consists of three components: recognizing personal perspective limitations, embracing multiple interpretations as mutually constitutive rather than competitive, and continuously renewing one's perspective. This translates into educational practices like the *Circle of Renewing Perspectives*, where students share observations and discover how each perspective reveals others' limitations.

Similarly, *Renewed Ecological Humility* emerges as a value oriented toward nature, comprising recognition of the limitations of human understanding regarding natural systems, openness to complexity revealed by every living creature, and constant perspective renewal. This manifests in practices like *Ecological Observation Circles*, where students monitor living organisms while discovering new complexity layers that exceed human comprehension.

These values exemplify how Creative Love in Education can generate a range of educational principles aligned with expanded apophatic theology. Each value translates the fundamental recognition of human limitation into concrete educational practices that preserve both student autonomy and transmissible values.

Comparative Analysis with Other Educational Models

Creative Love in Education addresses limitations in existing educational approaches. Traditional theological models often establish predetermined values that students must adopt, potentially constraining their autonomy. Conversely, critical models may resist all fixed values, creating difficulties in transmitting principles between generations (Luzon 2015, 464–70). Creative Love offers an alternative that preserves both autonomy and value transmission.

This approach particularly complements Agamben's concept of *Whatever Love*, which emphasizes loving students for their potential, whether realized or not (Jasinski and Lewis 2016, 430–40). While Whatever Love prevents educational activity from being conditioned by preliminary social requirements, it still positions the student exclusively as beloved, possibly limiting their capacity to become loving themselves. This limitation emerges precisely because the absence of preliminary conditions for love paradoxically creates its own constraint: if no preliminary conditions exist – not even the condition of learning to love others – then the capacity to love cannot itself be positioned as a necessary prerequisite in educational practice. This paradox reveals how unconditioned love, when applied unidirectionally from teacher to student, inadvertently restricts the intergenerational transmission of the very love ethic it embodies. Creative Love resolves this by establishing a bidirectional relationship where both teacher and student function simultaneously as lover and beloved.

This distinction becomes particularly significant in addressing what Agamben terms the "death of the student as a form of life." This concept, developed in response to educational practices that subordinate learning to technological or political imperatives, describes the disconnection of individuals from authentic learning communities. Whatever Love offers partial protection against this by rejecting preliminary conditions on educational love. However, Creative Love

provides more comprehensive protection by enabling the intergenerational transmission of this unconditional love ethic.[5]

The model also addresses the limitations of apophatic theology. Traditional negative theology, focusing exclusively on God's unattainability, struggles to generate positive educational values. By expanding the apophatic approach to encompass human knowledge limitations, Creative Love creates space for positive values emerging from these limitations rather than in spite of them. This transformed apophatic framework resolves the apparent paradox between loving students unconditionally and transmitting values that may change them (Luzon 2023a, 20–21). Unlike approaches that position God as a direct source of predetermined educational values, Creative Love derives its values from recognizing the boundaries of human attainment concerning God. This fundamental shift prevents educational values from being harnessed to serve divine existence, instead allowing them to emerge from the recognition of mutual limitation and interdependence.

Concluding Discussion

This research demonstrates that theology and critical thinking can indeed merge to produce a unique educational love – Creative Love in Education – that provides positive, implementable, and transmissible values. The study expands on previous research by not merely identifying theological foundations in critical thought, but actively constructing a framework where theology and criticism mutually reinforce educational practice.

The research broadens current conceptions of educational love by anchoring Whatever Love in an expanded theological-apophatic foundation. This anchoring reveals how every manifestation in reality can serve as a vehicle for Creative Love in Education by awakening consciousness to human limitations and unattainable divinity. The resulting relationship transcends traditional hierarchical educational dynamics without abandoning transmissible values.

Implementation challenges remain significant. Integrating Creative Love in Education within traditional educational frameworks requires reconciling a model that questions knowledge acquisition with systems structured around measurable achievements. Teacher training presents complex challenges involving professional identity reconstruction and authority reconceptualization. Systemic changes in educational relationships, from parent-teacher interactions to curriculum development, will be necessary for full implementation.

Future research should examine how Creative Love in Education manifests in diverse classrooms through ethnographic studies utilizing observation protocols focused on mutual recognition of knowledge limitations. Comparative research between religious and secular educational frameworks could explore how institutional contexts affect implementation. Longitudinal studies might trace the development of students' epistemological perspectives through this model, employing interviews, reflective journals, and systematic observation.

Additional research should explore whether similar theological-apophatic ideas enabling comparable expansions exist in other religious traditions. This could deepen the model's cross-

[5] On the critical importance of the practical implementation of ideals such as love and youth in actual educational systems, see: Hotam 2024, 200–10.

cultural applicability while preserving its essential characteristics. Further investigation should examine how Creative Love addresses the paradox between unconditional acceptance and value transmission in diverse cultural contexts.

Creative Love in Education offers a promising pathway for bridging seemingly irreconcilable educational approaches. By transforming limitations into foundations for mutual recognition and shared value development, it creates educational relationships where both teacher and student participate in a dance of mutual constitution rather than hierarchical transmission. In a world increasingly divided between uncritical acceptance of tradition and rejection of all inherited values, this middle path may provide the educational foundation for sustainable, humane communities.

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Religious Education in Germany – Challenges and Opportunities

Hans Mendl

Abstract
The dilemma of religious education in Germany is that, on the one hand, the subject is excellently protected by the constitution, and on the other hand, conceptual and content-related changes appear inevitable due to societal transformation processes. Therefore, religious education requires justification both to society and to the church. Various perspectives must be considered for its future design: the objective for the children and young people learning it, the internal didactic structure of the subject, the global task of enabling students to deal with plurality, and questions regarding the organizational orientation of the subject.

Keywords
religious education; plurality; empowerment; positionality; values; culture; education; school system; identity; tradition; school environment; school pastoral care

1. The legal and social framework

Religious education in Germany is better protected by law than any other school subject, and yet the subject faces major social and conceptual challenges. Its value to society must be justified, as must the benefit that the churches have from being present in public schools. In addition, both the external conceptual form of the subject and the internal didactic design and objectives must be explained. After the experience with the National Socialist regime's desire to impose a binding world view on all citizens, the fathers and mothers of the German Basic Law designed a state that is committed to ideological neutrality. At the same time, it was clear that this state had to guarantee freedom of religion and also needed bearers of values in order to constitute a community of values. This applied to the public school system. Religious education was defined as a "res mixta", a mixed area, in which churches and other recognized religious communities are entitled and obliged to participate as public corporations (cf. Kropač 2021, 37f).

Article 7.3 of the Basic Law:

> "Religious education is a regular subject in public schools, with the exception of non-denominational schools. Without prejudice to the state's right of supervision, religious education is taught in accordance with the principles of the religious communities. No teacher may be obliged to teach religious education against his or her will."

Religious education held a strong constitutional position before Germany's denominational composition significantly changed. Until the 1960s, the proportion of Christians was approximately 95% of society.
This is very different today. Earlier than expected the proportion of Catholic and Protestant Christians in Germany fell to the magical level of under 50% in 2023 (religious affiliation 2023). This was not caused by the increase in people with other religious affiliations (proportion of Muslims: 4%), but by people who do not belong to any religion. As a result, there is naturally also a shift in awareness for the importance of church, religion, and religious education. In other words, more than ever, it is necessary to openly justify the benefit a society has from a school subject that is dedicated to religious education.

2. The benefits of religious education for public schools and beyond
Since the Würzburg Synod, at which the important document "Religious Education in Schools" was published in 1974, religious education in public schools has had a consistently diaconal orientation. Religious education sees itself as a selfless service of the church at schools. It contributes to the formation of young people's identities and to the humanization of schools. As paradoxical as it may sound, religious education in public schools also benefits people who do not attend the subject (cf. Mendl 2018). This can be interpreted from various perspectives:

Religious studies: Religious education explores the culture on which societies and states in Europe are based. Anyone who wants to understand the origins of European culture, which was shaped by Christianity, also needs basic knowledge of religious objects, works of art, customs, rhythms of time and ways of thinking. The mode of encountering the world with religion helps the subject to understand the world and to discover culture. Understanding how "religion works" is the basis for dealing respectfully with people who think differently and believe differently in a global and pluralistic world. Other subjects like German, history, music, and art also benefit from the basic knowledge of religion that students acquire in religious education.

Religious communities: This argument may be surprising. A state also has the task of obliging religions to comply with its constitutional requirements because all religions – and Christianity is no exception – carry the seeds of fundamentalism within them. Public religious education in schools contributes to the civilization of religion. Religious education is more effective when it takes place in public schools rather than in private or informal settings.

The individual: There are situations in people's lives that cannot be dealt with intellectually. The Würzburg Synod already mentions such situations and makes clear reference to them. If the religious dimension were to be excluded from such situations and experiences, it would mean allowing the individual to wither away. For this reason, religious education is always designed to be correlative in its internal didactic structure. Questions of tradition are linked to those of children and young people today. Religious education thus supports young people in finding their identity and coping with life.

School as a place of action: There are threshold points of school life: entering and leaving the respective type of school, the beginning and end of the school year, the beginning and end of the school week, and festivals of the year. The school system depends on someone knowing how to shape these periods of consolidation culturally and religiously. The services of school pastoral care and crisis intervention are particularly in demand if death strikes the school. The forms of religion outlined above contribute to the cultivation and humanization of the school environment; when incorporated into the school community in a reflective manner, they can become elements of school development and culture. Religion therefore humanizes the school as a place of action. These patterns of justification for the importance of religious education must be continually incorporated into the social discourse.

3. The benefits of religious education for the churches

The importance and scope of religious education for the churches can also be expressed in numbers: In 2023, 1.27 million people (6.2%) attended Catholic Sunday services in Germany (Church Statistics 2023). In contrast, the current figures show that 1.7 million students attended Catholic religious education in the 2023/24 school year (cf. Turulski 2024).

The Catholic bishops in Germany have now recognized how important religious education teachers are as the first "bridge builders" between today's children and young people and the church (Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz 2005, 34ff). After all, it can be assumed that the interfaces between the (age) cohorts who attend Sunday services and religious education are quite different. At the same time, critical questions are repeatedly raised about the success of religious education. These questions are based on expectations that no longer correspond to the current concept of religious education. As previously mentioned, contemporary religious education is characterized not by a catechetical, but by a distinctly diaconal orientation.

Building on this, religious education and school pastoral care constitute exemplary expressions of a concept of religious presence in the public sphere that is characterized by openness to plurality (cf. Mendl 2015). Religious education takes place within the context of societal plurality that is embedded in the public school system, whereas the congregational form of church often tends toward a form of self-enclosure or ghettoization. Since the Würzburg Synod, religious education has been confronted with an internal plurality that includes believing students and those who are non-believing, searching, undecided, or indifferent. This capacity for differentiation may well represent one of the most significant prospects for the future of religious education in Germany. The Christian faith must be made plausible to this pluralistic student body. Contrary to the attempts in all dioceses to keep the basic clerical structure of the church alive in a makeshift manner by creating large pastoral areas, religious education is predominantly and almost exclusively the responsibility of laypeople, state and church religious teachers. Religious education as a school subject in schools must necessarily be adaptable institutionally and conceptually because it has to comply with the rules and the respective educational theoretical guidelines of the state. What happens in schools in terms of religion

must be aligned with the temporal rhythms of the secular. This is carried out by many volunteers, especially in the field of school pastoral care. In many of these aspects, the way in which religious education deals with social plurality could be a blueprint for the church as a whole.

4. The future of religious education – four perspectives

At the same time, the question of the internal and external development of the subject also arises. The anthropological starting point, the internal structure, global objectives, and the organizational structure of religious education in the future are four perspectives.

4.1 Anthropological framework: Christian empowerment

Even before all content-related educational goals, children and young people who attend the subject should go into life strengthened by the Good News. A "Christian empowerment" aims to expand the possibility of determining one's own life and should also be the guiding metaphor for the direction of the professional actions of teachers (Domsgen 2019, 343–352, see also Bucher 2024). Appropriate teaching always strives to enable and empower the learners and promotes their ability to participate and show solidarity. On a systemic level, empowerment raises awareness of the connection between education and cultural, social and economic structures. Understood in this way, Christian empowerment always promotes resilience and corresponds to the concept of enabling (Nothaft 2012).

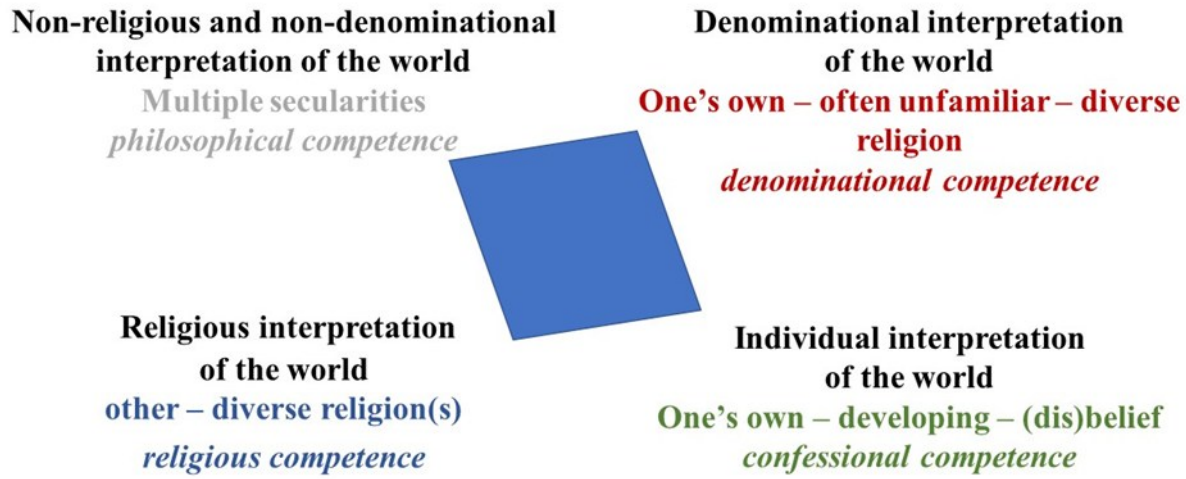
4.2 Inner structure: Performative elements in religious education

In view of the break with tradition, it is no longer enough to just talk about religion. The ability to interpret religion ("interpretation competence") must be intertwined with the possibility of participating in religion ("participation competence"). This is the only way to create an experience-oriented basis for understanding religious practice. Against the background of a responsibly designed concept of performative religious education, religious education can invite students not only to understand taught religion, but also to experience the resonances of a lived religion in its life-enhancing facets in order to gain a taste and sense for the infinite (Schleiermacher) (Leonhard, Hanusa 2021; Mendl 2022, 2024). In this respect, religious education has the task of "offering the perspective of faith" (Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz 2022). Teaching is successful "When there is a spark in the classroom" because a relationship to the world develops in which the participants feel touched and moved and can experience themselves as self-effective (Rosa, Endres 2022). As Ignatius of Loyola aptly expressed it, "It is not the wealth of knowledge that satiates the soul and gives it satisfaction, but rather the feeling and tasting of things from within" (Ignatius of Loyola 1956, 7).

4.3 Global objective: The ability to deal with plurality

Religious education is intended to prepare children and young people to deal with plurality. In addition to incorporating religious interpretations of the world, there is a growing recognition

of the perspectives of those identified as non-religious. The central concern is to engage respectfully with diverse truth claims, each of which must be critically examined in terms of its argumentative coherence and practical implications. The difference between the interpretation of the world implied by the denominationally bound subject and the different individual perspectives of the students must be regarded as a reality. Adolescent Catholic students are also characterized by a not-yet-given consent to religion, faith, and church. They will make their own individual decisions. In a global world, other religious interpretations of the world must also be included for students to acquire comprehensive religious competence. Finally, considering the demographic trends outlined at the beginning of this essay, it appears essential to engage with secular constructions of meaning as well. Even those categorized as religiously unaffiliated articulate existential orientations and frameworks of meaning that warrant respectful consideration (Jürgens 2021; Loffeld 2024).


Non-religious and non-denominational interpretation of the world
Multiple secularities
philosophical competence
Denominational interpretation of the world
One's own – often unfamiliar – diverse religion
denominational competence
Religious interpretation of the world
other – diverse religion(s)
religious competence
Individual interpretation of the world
One's own – developing – (dis)belief
confessional competence

A nuanced understanding of the role of positionality among those engaged in religious education is essential. For example, the Koblenz Consensus, was formulated and endorsed by German Protestant and Catholic religious education scholars in 2024:
Religious education teachers must make transparent recognizable religious and theological viewpoints (*transparency requirement*). Dealing with plurality means that competing patterns of interpretation must be presented and dealt with respectfully (*controversy requirement*). Dealing with the learners must be characterized by respectful communication (*respect requirement, prohibition of overwhelming*). The aim of such religious education is for children and young people to develop the ability to judge and act in matters of religion (*orientation requirement*).

4.4. Organizational structure: Religious education for everyone?

Finally, there is the central question of the future form of religious education. As mentioned above, religious education appears to be guaranteed under the constitution. However, limiting

it to this status is neither socially nor conceptually sufficient. If the objective is to provide the widest possible access to religious education for all students, a mere adherence to the status quo proves inadequate. Moreover, the ongoing process of secularization is accompanied by growing organizational challenges at the local level. In regions where either the Catholic or Protestant Church exists in a diaspora context, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ensure the provision of religious education with a sufficient number of participants. For this reason, there are conceptual models that go beyond denominational religious education which can also be discussed accordingly (cf. Riegel 2018).

Denominational religious education: The homogeneity of narrowly understood religious education (for example, Catholic students in Catholic religious education) enables access to religion from a participant perspective ("from religion"), but is also a problem because learning as a classroom unit is usually not possible from an organizational perspective. The question arises as to whether the outlined goal of plurality can be achieved in this concept. Furthermore, is it enough to only consider the group of one's own denomination when it comes to religious education?

Ethics – Values – Religion: The other extreme would be the abandonment of explicit religious education and the establishment of a general subject of Ethics – Values – Religion. Experience with the integrated subject "Life Studies – Ethics – Religious Studies" (LER) in Brandenburg has shown, however, that there is a very real danger that religious education will be marginalized.

Religious studies lessons: Even with this model of teaching with a pluralistic student body and teaching from a bird's eye view, there is a risk that the inner side of religion and religions will not be sufficiently emphasized or that only the problematic and functional aspects of religion will be addressed. There is also the question of whether religious studies, ethics, and philosophy would replace theology as the appropriate leading discipline.

Denominational-cooperative religious education: Model projects for denominational-cooperative religious education are currently being carried out in all federal states in Germany. The aim is not only to overcome the organizational problems outlined above in diaspora areas, but also to take cautious steps to reposition the subject ecumenically. The bishops also support these projects, provided certain framework conditions are met (Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz 2016). Non-Christian students can also attend these lessons. According to many religious educators, this model is at least 40 years too late.

Religious education for all: In the federal state of Lower Saxony, the subject "Christian religious education for all" will be introduced from the coming school year 2025/2026 onward (Heinig et al. 2024). The two churches are responsible for a joint school subject aimed at non-Christian students. The school subject is by no means intended to be just a denominational study

that also includes the other denomination. At its core, the school subject should be geared towards the students' questions. It should be about critically examining topics such as truth, meaning and orientation. The "Christian religion according to Protestant and Catholic principles" should then also be included in the arguments. The appeal of this model could be the later inclusion of other religious communities in order to develop an overarching model capable of plurality.

Conclusion: The goal: Religious education for as many students as possible

The fact that religious education in Germany is not as bad as is often assumed is illustrated by the dropout rates, which are overall quite unspectacular. The number of students who voluntarily attend the subject already exceeds the number who opt out. If we could succeed in attracting many more students to the subject, this would be an important step toward providing as many students as possible with religious education. Broad-based religious education appears indispensable, especially in a society that is becoming increasingly pluralistic and secular. Anyone who wants to understand the world must also include the various forms of religious interpretation alongside ideologically neutral and secular ones. The saying still holds true that there can be no world peace without religious peace.

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Religious and Cultural Mediation
A response to the signs of the times

Mária Spišiaková

Abstract
Theology and theological faculties not only have a role to play vis-à-vis believers, but they also have a role to play as part of the university and the public sphere. Kairology, as a spiritual diagnosis of the times, is a part of public theology and can contribute to the social common good. It can be helpful in the search for solutions to the problems of our time. One of such solutions represents the bachelor's programme Religious and Cultural Mediation, which responds to the deep divisions and different conflicts within our communities.

Keywords
theological faculty; theology; kairology; dialogue; mediation; conflict; divided society; fraternity; coexistence; education; virtues; common good; communication; understanding

In the context of ongoing conflicts and geopolitical tensions in the world, we observe a growing polarisation and radicalisation also within Slovak society. Public opinion polls indicate a decline in trust toward democratic institutions, while extremist views gain increasing support. Political debates transform into sharp confrontations; opponents are frequently unwilling to meet, resorting instead to harsh exchanges on social media. Society is divided not only in political preferences but also in attitudes toward fundamental values (Žuffa 2024, 74). These factors deepen overall frustration and the inability to engage in constructive dialogue. Slovak society is not the only one that finds itself lacking mutual understanding.

The synodal process within the Catholic Church, whose outcomes are to be implemented over the next three years, has revealed a deficiency in the ability to truly listen and engage in kind and sincere dialogue aimed at seeking together new paths and answers to pressing questions. Many participants have thus identified an urgent need to learn new forms of collaboration, participation, and shared responsibility in the spirit of synodality (see *Final Document* on www.synod.va).

The pursuit of reconciliation, forgiveness, and mutual understanding are also central themes of the ongoing Jubilee Year. Pilgrimages to Roman basilicas and holy sites or jubilee churches aim to help the faithful renew their relationship with God, while acts of mercy are intended to heal and restore relationships within families, within the Church and society.

It is evident that addressing many current social and ecological global issues requires mutual cooperation among believers and non-believers, churches and societies of various cultures and religions. This requires people who are able to see cultural and religious differences as

enrichment, not as sources of conflict or division. These mediators can assist in moderating dialogues, reconciling conflicting parties, and finding common grounds for mutual cooperation and coexistence.

The Role of Theology

The above facts can be seen as signs of the times that challenge the Church's various communities and institutions to respond to seemingly irreconcilable divisions, the inability to listen and understand different perspectives, and to find common solutions to often complex situations.[1] According to Tomáš Halík, examining the signs of the times is part of public theology, which he refers to as "kairology" (from Greek word καιρός – "the right moment") in the sense of "spiritual diagnosis of the era" (Halík 2021, 41). This requires cooperation with philosophers, sociologists, and representatives of other humanities to correctly understand the cultural and historical context of the time. Moreover, this spiritual diagnosis is crucial to be communicated in a language comprehensible beyond the theological academic community and ecclesiastical environment.

Academic theology at universities has a dual role. Primarily, it serves believers and the Church by reflecting on how Christian faith perceives God and how that faith is translated into life. Therefore, the theology must have constant contact with believers and respond to their immediate needs and the current cultural context in which faith is embodied. However, since theological faculties are also part of the public space and the academic world, they must meet criteria of scientific rigor, clarity, and societal usefulness (Gallus 2024, 69).

Johanna Rahner adds that theological faculties also help the community of believers to be capable of self-reflection and self-criticism (Rahner 2024, 97). She further clarifies the reasons why the existence of all theological faculties in general are socially necessary. One reason is that they offer and bear responsibility for resources important for social cohesion and the common good through a positive attitude toward the secular state. They also bring a perspective that transcends a purely naturalistic worldview and alongside other humanities, they represent a different facet of scientific inquiry (Rahner 2024, 97).

In the realm of knowledge, theology is called to expand the boundaries of reason and, in dialogue with other disciplines, to present an image of God who is not only the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but also the God of philosophers and scientists.[2] The same can be applied to other theological concepts such as life, the human person, nature, or history (Tanzella-Nitti 2024, 371).

[1] As stated in the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* 4: "To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics."

[2] Similarly, some scientists try to dialogue with theology from their point of view. See for example Karaba, Miroslav. 2014. *Božie pôsobenie vo svete: reflexia koncepcií J. Polkinghorna, A. Peacocka a I. Barboura.* Trnava: Dobrá kniha.

Due to deficiencies in these areas, current theological faculties are often perceived merely as unnecessary appendages of state universities. A thoroughly developed kairology as a practical science that seeks concrete answers to recognized signs of the times could have multiple benefits. It could contribute to the common good in collaboration with sciences and other societal components and at the same time highlight an area where theology and theological faculties can offer their specific contributions.

The necessity of dialogue

One of the aforementioned signs of the times is a divided society, marked by strong individualism, mistrust and often despair, which requires, first of all, a renewal of "fraternity and social friendship" (*Fratelli tutti*, 5). It presupposes a common dialogue in mutual respect and a sincere search for what unites us.

Such dialogue is more than a communication tool – it is the art of coexistence on two levels: between individuals and between groups of different cultures, religions or worldviews. The Christian understands dialogue above all "as a response to a challenge addressed to him at a particular historical time (*kairos*)" (Zamboni 2014, 211). The Second Vatican Council definitively rejected the dichotomy between the Church and the world and affirmed the close symbiosis between Christians and other people:

> "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are at the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men" (*Gaudium et spes*, 1).

Such a symbiosis, however, presupposes the ability to listen, to perceive what bothers people, and to engage in a dialogue that is not a one-sided affair. It is not only about what the Church can and should offer to the world, but also about what Christians can learn about others, about themselves, their own identity and vocation.

The dialogue of Christians must take place in the truth: "Truth, in fact, is *lógos* which creates *diá-logos*, and hence communication and communion" (*Caritas in veritate*, 4). Even though it always happens in the background of faith, which depends on the mediation of culture, truth enables "to let go of subjective opinions and impressions, and to move beyond cultural and historical limitations" (*Caritas in veritate*, 4). Dialogue must lead to

> "an encounter with the other, to the establishment of important bonds across potentially irreconcilable differences, in order to heal possible wounds and to set in motion a path of true reconciliation" (Zamboni 2014, 212).

Dialogue requires humility because truth cannot be owned. Only the humble-minded reject the temptation to impose his own view and can listen attentively. It also presupposes freedom, non-attachment to one's own opinions, and respect for the freedom and conscience of the other.

Such a dialogue appears to be in contrast to the sometimes-proclaimed clash of radically different cultures (Zamboni 2014, 211).
The aim of dialogue is never to convince the other of one's own truth, nor it is merely an exchange of arguments and counter-arguments:

> "Dialogue is a relational process whose meaning is not exhausted by the transmission of information or the formation of consensus; it concerns people, not as objectified and interchangeable units, but as unique persons with their own freedom and responsibility. Their mutual understanding is the goal of dialogue" (Poláková 2008, 8).

Such a dialogue presupposes a sense of responsibility for the other and "the ability to respect the other's point of view and to admit that it may include legitimate convictions and concerns" (*Fratelli tutti*, 203). Dialogue opens to hope. It can endure the fatigue of getting to know the other, it can wait for the appropriate time when the other will manifest himself, and it creates opportunities for sharing. Dialogue is related to love.

Through dialogue to mediation

A specific case of dialogue is the search for reconciliation between conflicting parties. Unfortunately, the necessary skills and procedures to conduct such a dialogue are often lacking in our communities. The more complex and escalated a conflict is, the more there is a need for trained persons who can moderate and facilitate such a dialogue and thus accompany the conflicting parties in their search for a common solution. Such an activity is called mediation (defined as a voluntary, confidential process in which a neutral mediator helps the disputing parties to negotiate a settlement out of court). Mediation can also be seen as a process that enables bridge-building between different cultural and religious groups. It is about actively seeking common language and understanding, reconciling conflicts and promoting dialogue between people with different views, traditions and values. In the context of education, mediation is a tool that contributes to better mutual understanding and cooperation in a multicultural and multi-religious environment.
The main skills of a mediator are active listening, empathy and ability to facilitate dialogue. Although theology graduates are already considered suitable to do mediators for example in the courts, the Faculty of Theology of the University of Trnava offers a special professionally oriented Bachelor's programme in Religious and Cultural Mediation that trains mediators, soft skills trainers, community workers, and professionals in the field of religious communication and personnel work (tftu.sk/mediacia).[3] Programme graduates find employment in various of religious and civil institutions or companies where people of different cultures and religions come together, as well as in the field of education, where practices for conflict prevention and reconciliation are needed.

[3] More about the vision of the Jesuit theological faculty see in Jeník, Lukáš, Mária Spišiaková, and Jozef Žuffa. 2017. "Quo vadis Aloisianum – k vízii jezuitskej teologickej fakulty." *Studia Aloisiana* 8 (2), 35–60.

The theological foundations of mediation are based on Christian teaching and tradition, which emphasizes forgiveness, reconciliation, love of neighbour, and sincere dialogue with the world and with other religions. The roots of mediation as a search for a balance between the different needs and interests of conflicting parties exist in the history of philosophical thought. Philosophical approaches like phenomenology and existentialism can be inspirational for mediation through their emphasis on subjectivity, empathy, and relational dynamics. Knowledge of psychology, religious studies, law, and the mastery of practical techniques for conducting non-violent communication (Rosenberg 2005) or facilitating and moderating group dialogue (Pokorná et al. 2023) is also essential. In the spirit of the Jesuit tradition of holistic human formation, the study will combine intellectual depth with spiritual wisdom and a practical approach.[4]

In terms of the religious and cultural content to which the mediation process can relate, the current situation gives us many clues. Different attitudes towards the LBTQI+ community, vaccination or warfare, as well as attitudes towards immigrants, Jews, Muslims, or liberals and progressives, are very often sources of tension and conflict both in society and in the Church. A valuable experience for elaboration of the practical part of the mediator program are various discussions with students and the public on these topics.[5]

Lines of Mediation Formation

If theology is to be understood as education, it means that it is realized as the care of the soul, its purpose is to accompany a person in his or her personal development (Svobodová 2024, 2). It happens in three dimensions: in the knowledge and acceptance of oneself, in the understanding of human relationality, and in establishing and deepening a relationship with God.

These three dimensions of personal development are also an integral part of mediation studies. First and foremost, mediation presupposes the personal formation of future mediators, because accompanying others through dialogue toward reconciliation requires a mature personality. Knowledge of oneself – of one's inner world and emotional experiences – is a prerequisite for self-acceptance, which in turn is the basis for accepting and understanding others. The art of dialogue requires the ability to grow, to give and receive, and to respect the other. These are essential for every dialogue participant, but especially for the one who is to accompany others on the path to reconciliation.

In mediation practice, it is equally crucial to understand how relational dynamics work and how certain inappropriate relational patterns – e.g., tendencies to dominate or destroy others, to

[4] What Jesuit Superior General Arturo Sosa, S.I., said in relation to the pandemic crisis is also true in today's situation: "This crisis is a spiritual and intellectual challenge for us. Listening to the Spirit, trusting in God and allowing ourselves to be guided by him does not exempt us from the effort to understand in depth the causes of this crisis, its consequences and the ways to make it an occasion to advance towards a more just and humane world. The apostolic body of the Society rests and walks on its two legs: spiritual depth and, also, intellectual depth." Webinar: *The Preferences in a time of Uncertainty and COVID-19*. https://www.jesuits.africa/the-preferences-in-a-time-of-uncertainty-and-covid-19/ (7. 4. 2025)

[5] It was possible to extend these discussion activities beyond the Theological faculty through the civic association Apeiron – Institute of Humanities Studies (www.apeiron-ihs.org).

parasitize, or to show indifference toward them – may constitute significant barriers to dialogue (Poláková 2008, 11–19). Conversely, it is necessary to adopt approaches and develop virtues essential for dialogue such as patience, kindness, disciplined argumentation, critical tolerance, and the capacity for self-criticism (Pokorná et al. 2023, 18).

Cultural and religious mediation requires knowledge of the differences among cultures and religions and an awareness of their commonalities and shared roots. It is equally necessary to understand the role of spirituality or religion in human life and the importance of human relationship to the divine. Religion is significant not only in shaping personal attitudes but also as a socio-cultural phenomenon influencing the values and preferences of entire communities. Since religion involves a claim to totality and bears both peace-making and violent potential, it is necessary to study and critically discern religious phenomena to prevent potential escalation of interreligious conflict and, conversely, to utilize those elements of religion and culture that can serve as foundations for reconciliation and mutual understanding (Beck 2018, 68–69).

Conclusion: Theology in the Service of the Public Sphere

As society faces deep polarization, loss of trust, and the inability to engage in constructive dialogue, the public role of theology has taken on renewed importance. Theological faculties, often questioned for their societal relevance, are now more than ever called to step out of their inner-church frameworks and become partners in seeking solutions to contemporary challenges.

The Religious and Cultural Mediation theology programme is a concrete manifestation of the kairological sensibility, the ability of theology to read the signs of the times, to speak the language of contemporary man, and to enter areas where the fate of understanding between individuals, groups, and nations is broken. This is not simply a matter of applying Christian teaching to practice, but of creating a space in which theology engages in dialogue with psychology, the social sciences and cultural analysis, thereby fulfilling its role as part of public discourse.

Understood in this way, theology defends its own scientific value and also asserts its right to exist within the university. It shows that in a time when new forms of coexistence are being sought, religious thought can offer more than just answers for believers; it can contribute to the common good by forming individuals capable of facilitating dialogue, reconciliation, and “a culture of encounter” (*Fratelli tutti*, 216).

Thus, the Faculty of Theology is not merely a place for transmitting religious knowledge. It also becomes a point of contact between the world of meaning and the world of challenges. It forms personalities that are able to connect the reflection of faith with the ability to act in concrete conflict situations, thereby fulfilling the most essential mission of academic theology: to be a voice of understanding in times of tension, a bridge between transcendence and everyday life.

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Leadership Styles and their Influence on Ethical Behaviour in the Education of Healthcare Professionals

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Abstract
The Organisation and Management in Healthcare programme in the Czech Republic has been established in the faculties of health studies. As the most common follow-up master's degree programme, it also includes subjects that educate non-medical healthcare professionals in leadership. Given the experience of healthcare professionals with a negative leadership function style, it is important to pay attention to the teaching of different leadership styles with their impact on ethical behaviour. The presented article will present two leadership styles, servant leadership and transformational leadership, with their impact on ethics and values. Education in these approaches can change the style of performing a leadership function, the climate, and satisfaction in the workplace, and last but not least, the quality of the care provided.

Keywords
leadership; ethical behaviour; healthcare professionals; education; training; healthcare management; personal and professional development; servant leadership; transformational leadership; care; values; workplace

Introduction

The professional programme Organisation and Management in Healthcare in the Czech Republic has been established in the faculties of non-medical health studies. As the most common follow-up master's degree programme, it also includes subjects that educate non-medical healthcare professionals in leadership. The goal is to educate healthcare professionals for various managerial, organisational and administrative positions. Leadership is an important cross-cutting skill in applicable positions. Leadership involves leading people in the often demanding and stressful healthcare environment. It is not only about the technique of leading people, but also about ethical leadership, decision-making and behaviour, which is often directly reflected in the climate in the workplace and the quality of care provided to patients. Currently, the number of studies focusing on climate and relationships in the workplace is increasing. One of the negative manifestations that healthcare professionals also experience is mobbing/bossing. In our case, this manifests as a superior abusing their power by systematically bullying a subordinate. Relational violence has a negative impact on the mental and physical

health of the injured party. It affects the quality of their work, and often also leads to burnout and consideration of leaving the job. In the healthcare sector, general nurses are the most at-risk group, with the prevalence of mobbing among general nurses commonly exceeding 50% (Václavíková and Kozáková 2021, 391). On the other hand, current leadership trends have the ambition to "create a better world" through creating a better and safer working environment in healthcare facilities. The educational process offers leadership styles in that aim to address social and ethical issues and moral dilemmas and develop positive ethical behaviour (Meeuwsen 2024, 40–42).

Leadership styles are crucial in improving quality indicators in healthcare and nursing. Their influence on health outcomes varies depending on the specific approach, as some styles may help bridge existing gaps in care, while others may unintentionally widen them (Sfantou et al. 2017, 73). The above experiences lead to the following questions: What leadership styles have a positive effect on ethical behaviour, values and the moral climate in the workplace? What leadership style can prevent the tendency to mobbing/bossing?

This article will discuss two leadership styles that should be part of the comprehensive training of healthcare professionals for leadership positions. The following two leadership styles were selected for two reasons: both styles emphasize ethical values and behaviours, and both styles are particularly appropriate for healthcare settings where ethical behaviour is key to ensuring quality patient care. Methodologically, the essay borders literary research and a research essay.

Leadership styles in relation to ethical behaviour in the workplace

As mentioned, the essay will present two leadership styles that can be a response to the demand for better leadership, organisation, and management in public health, and minimize negative phenomena. These styles are servant leadership and transformational leadership. Both styles positively influence the ethical behaviour of health workers, the overall ethical climate in the workplace, and the ethical aspects of patient care. These styles are currently receiving attention from the perspective of published studies (Canavesi and Minelli 2022, 267–89).

Servant Leadership

The term "servant leadership" makes it clear that the role and function of a leader is a life of service to other people. A true leader functions in service to others by supporting their needs for their growth and development (Greenleaf 1970; Greanleaf 1977). It reflects their understanding of employment as a service to others, even in the context of perceiving their function as a mission. They more deeply understand that their identity and their profession includes the spiritual dimension of being a person (O'Brien 2011). Ten key characteristics of servant leadership are: listening to others in open communication, empathy and the ability to empathise with the feelings and perspectives of other people, supporting their own and others' relationship healing, awareness and understanding of situations and opportunities to act ethically, persuasion in the form of motivation for a common consensus, conceptualization as the ability to think strategically in a broader perspective, foreseeing the consequences of their own decisions, stewardship as stewardship in accepting responsibility, commitment to the

personal and professional growth of people with building a community with feelings of belonging and mutual respect (Spears 1998). It is precisely these skills that should be the focus of the theoretical and practical part of leadership training for healthcare organisations and management.

Studies show that servant leadership increases employee engagement, satisfaction, and efficiency of services provided, which also increases the competitiveness of healthcare facilities. A workplace with servant leadership characteristics gains a significant competitive advantage (Raoush 2022, 305). Servant leadership is based on valuing others and their opinions, supporting employee independence and autonomy, and recognising work contributions. It also increases interest and engagement (Canavesi and Minelli 2022, 413–35). Servant leadership creates a space for mutual trust, thereby humanising the workplace. It is the human dimension of servant leadership that takes priority over purely economic models of leadership (Saleem et al. 2020, 1–16). These so-called "soft skills" of leadership should be addressed in the healthcare workers' education and training system.

Transformational Leadership

Servant leadership complements the transformational leadership style well. A transformational leader focuses on each specific team member individually, monitors their potential, and helps them change into a role that will help them develop their personal and professional development. Transformational leadership changes individuals, leads people to change and grow with the help of four factors (named the "four I's"): ideal influence through being an ethical role model with a value system that others want to internalise; inspirational motivation with support for feelings of belonging, pride and meaningfulness of work; intellectual stimulation that encourages new inspirations, innovations with increased autonomy and self-confidence; individual approach with recognition of the personality of each team member with their potential (Bass and Riggio 2006; Hall et al. 2002).

The transformational leadership style can be implemented individually and in groups. It is not intended only for leadership positions. Every employee at all positions and levels of the organisation can have the characteristics of a transformational leader for others. This changes the climate in the entire workplace, including the set goals (Rada 1999, 18–33). Therefore, the leader is more of a coach and mentor than a manager. From the perspective of ethical values, high demands are placed on transformational leadership. Everyone moving toward transformational leadership must be aware that they must take great care of and shape their own conscience and the ethical dimension of effective decision-making. The leader's charisma and professed ethical values are important in creating a vision that inspires others to accept as their own. Transformational leadership is often compared to transactional leadership, where motivation is solved in the form of reward/punishment, the relationship to subordinates is based on control, and the emphasis is placed on stability. A transactional style leader is more of a manager and supervisor who fulfills assigned tasks (Bass and Steidlmeier 1999, 181–217). The question is, which of these two styles currently prevails in the organisation and management of hospitals in the Czech Republic?

In the context of healthcare education, the transformative leadership style offers an opportunity to motivate each employee with the possibility of developing and changing individuals, groups, and the entire organisation. Studies confirm the need for change due to adverse events in healthcare caused by healthcare management and work environment factors (falls, incorrect medications, pressure ulcers, failure of rescue and mortality, patient and family care complaints, etc.). The theory of transformational leadership has the potential to change this trend, strengthen structural empowerment, increase greater job satisfaction and thus the quality of care and patient safety. The survey results that claim leadership style, nurses' satisfaction, and quality of care are related support this theory. Transformational leadership changes the work environment, strengthens the professionalism of healthcare professionals and their desire to remain in the profession, and improves patient care (Boamah et al. 2018, 180–89).
For these reasons, it is important to educate current healthcare facility management so they can adopt new leadership styles and become an example of the potential for change that healthcare professionals expect.

Discussion

The introduction, asked the question about leadership styles that positively impact ethical behaviour and values recognised in the workplace, including their preventive effect on negative phenomena such as mobbing/bossing. The article presented two styles with this potential. Other studies have described good communication skills and cooperative team leadership as effective preventive measures against mobbing/bossing (Václavíková et al. 2023, 956–64). Why does negative phenomena such as mobbing/bossing still occur within leadership and management when we have already described new leadership styles that the first empirical studies have verified? The perspective of contemporary psychotherapy offers an answer. It notices the influence of a societal atmosphere that emphasizes performance, constant comparison with others, dependence on reactions on social networks and the use of technology to cross boundaries (media bullying), narcissistic satisfaction of only one's own needs, and fear of losing control. This pressure from society has a negative effect on a person's mental life and behaviour. A narcissistic society and narcissistic leadership is characterised by relational usefulness and the pursuit of self-centered admiration that concentrates on one's own success regardless of each person's individual uniqueness. Other people are only the executors of one's own interests. Longing for kindness, affection, and the need for acceptance and human closeness, human nature, is then repressed into the unconscious (Poněšický 2025).
The negative pressure of a narcissistic type of society leads to the adoption of an unnatural style of leadership that is harmful to all parties involved. That is why leaders often turn to psychotherapists with their dissatisfied lives. In this case, the therapeutic aspect and the change sought are adopting the servant leadership or transformational leadership style presented here. A different leadership style will soon lead to a different climate in the workplace, more positive feedback, and better satisfaction for all stakeholders.

Limitations

They are several limitations in this essay. The first is certainly the lack of articles on servant leadership and transformational leadership in healthcare from the Czech environment. This essay used professional monographs and studies dealing with general servant leadership and its application to a different corporate sphere, not the healthcare environment. There are no studies that follow the application of servant leadership in healthcare in the Czech Republic. The above-mentioned limits are therefore a challenge for further research. The positive side is that the first studies from the Czech environment deal with the mentioned leadership styles from the research perspective of companies (Gašková 2020, 24–37). This essay presented Czech translations of valid questionnaires on the mentioned topic (Kolářová et al. 2016, 882–92).

Conclusion and recommendations for practice

This essay reflected the questions at the literary and essay research level: What leadership styles positively affect ethical behaviour, values, and moral climate in the workplace? What leadership style acts as a prevention for the tendency to mobbing/bossing? Servant leadership and transformational leadership are two types of leadership that fundamentally influence ethical behaviour.

Given the absence of studies in the Czech healthcare environment, it is appropriate to focus research on the following questions: What style would hospital employees prefer? Is it possible to change from transactional to servant leadership and transformational leadership, or their fruitful combination? How time-consuming would it be to change the mindset when adopting new styles with the subsequent transformation of the work environment?

The issue is also related to the concurrent education of students of the faculties of health studies in the Organisation and Management in Healthcare programme, as well as the current management of healthcare facilities within the framework of lifelong education. In this way, the current management could become a mentor for students, who could more easily apply the theoretical models of leadership in practice. Educating students in new styles without the opportunity to verify their effectiveness in practice due to confrontation with a different leadership style and negative experience in the work environment would delay the possibility of change for generations. Therefore, the concurrent education of students and the current management of healthcare facilities is important.

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Worldviews, Virtues, and Education
What móre on Meaning-oriented-reflection *MORe3.1.2*?

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Abstract
Meaning-oriented Reflection (i.e. 'MORe3.1.2') is addressed as *modus operandi* for reflecting on ethical behaviour. The article connects decolonising the curriculum, worldviews core virtues, educational interventions, while ensuring a safe learning environment. Critical thinking, based on normative rationales, allowing educational design research concepts, is focal. Four alternative interventions, using *MORe3.1.2* with admitting decolonised differing descriptions of a bonded network of six core virtues, provide answer. Ideas for further research are suggested.

Keywords
Bildung; educators; learners; personal development; decisions; decolonising; educational design research; ethics; higher education; judgment; meaning-oriented reflection; virtues; worldviews

Introduction of continuation
Peer reviewed articles, i.e. *Theology and Philosophy of Education* (Meeuwsen 2022a; Meeuwsen 2024), *Caritas et Veritas* (Meeuwsen 2023), and in *Decolonising Curriculum Knowledge – International Perspectives & Interdisciplinary Approaches* (Meeuwsen in Moncrieffe 2022b) provide fundament. The subject relates to theoretical understanding of, and to applied ethical reflection among learners. The subject is actual, stimulates awareness, and supports educators with their focus on assisting self-development of learners, i.e. *Bildung* (Meeuwsen 2024a). The article contributes by means of connecting meaning-oriented reflection (*MORe3.1.2*; Meeuwsen 2024) to six Core Virtues. While, four educational interventions, within a decolonised transformative safe-learning environment, are introduced.
The first paragraph addresses a network of six worldviews Core Virtues. The second paragraph connects practical advice on Aristotle's 'Golden Mean' to these. Then decolonised transformative meaning-oriented reflective interventions associated with six Core Virtues is considered. Finally, discussion, justification, and a conclusion, as well as ideas for future applied scientific research and practice, are provided.

Network of six Core Virtues

Virtues exist in relation to human existence, and contrast social disorder. Virtues are connected, are more than commonplace, are rich and assist life. Due to character and environment, their functioning varies among people. Virtues can be learned (Hupperts & Poortman in Aristoteles, 63; Eth. Nic. 1103a14-b32; Guardini 1963, 11). Comenius, prior to Enlightenment, (1657, 217–20) encourages developing virtues. Eight world-philosophies share six Core Virtues: Courage, Justice, Humanity, Temperance, Wisdom, and Transcendence. (Dahlsgaard et al. 2005, 205) (Table 1). Chun (2005, 281) comparably touches on six dimensions of organisational virtues (Integrity, Empathy, Warmth, Courage, Conscientiousness and Zeal).

Tradition	*Courage*	*Justice*	*Humanity*	*Temperance*	*Wisdom*	*Transcendence*
Confucianism		E	E	T	E	T
Taoism		E	E	E	E	T
Buddhism		E	E	E	T	E
Hinduism	E	E	E	E	E	E
Athenian philosophy	E	E	E	E	E	T
Christianity	E	E	E	E	E	E
Judaism	E	E	E	E	E	E
Islam	E	E	E	E	E	E

Note. E = explicitly named; T = thematically implied

Table 1 – Convergence of Virtues (Dahlsgaard et al. 2005, 211).

	Virtue	*Description*
1.	Courage	Emotional strengths involving exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of external or internal opposition; e.g. bravery, perseverance, and authenticity (honesty).
2.	Justice	Civic strengths underlying healthy community life; e.g. fairness, leadership, and citizenship or teamwork.
3.	Humanity	Interpersonal strengths 'tending and befriending' others; e.g. love and kindness.
4.	Temperance	Strengths protecting against excess; e.g. forgiveness, humility, and self-control.
5.	Wisdom	Cognitive strengths entailing the acquisition and use of knowledge; e.g. creativity, curiosity, judgment, and providing counsel.
6.	Transcendence	Strengths forging connections to the larger universe and thereby provide meaning; e.g. gratitude, hope, and spirituality.

Table 2 – Core Virtues (Dahlsgaard *et al*. 2005, 205).

According to Dahlsgaard et al. (2005, 211):

> "…courage is quite explicitly nominated (usually as 'physical valor') on most lists but is missing on others, notably those from the Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist traditions. We doubt that this means bravery is not valued in these traditions, and more modern definitions of courage that extend its meaning beyond the battlefield to fortitude in other domains can readily be detected in their classic literatures."

Plato regarded Wisdom, Courage, Temperance, and Justice, cardinal (*cardo*: axis) virtues of polis (society). Virtues are essential to society (Hupperts & Poortman in Aristoteles, 58).

Six Core Virtues and practical advice to reach the Golden Mean, and what for?

Aristotle made famous the Golden Mean. Each virtue stands in between two extremes of moral wickedness. The vices of excess and of defect are based on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (1103b32-1109a32). In relation to six Core Virtues, Table 3 provides an overview.

	Vice of excess	*Moral Value*	*Vice of Defect*	
1.	Overconfidence	Courage	Fear	(*Ibid*., 128–135)
2.	Harshness	Justice	Neglect	(*Ibid*., 163–187)
3.	Indulgence	Humanity	Cruelty	(*Ibid*., 154–156
4.	Debauchery	Temperance	Enjoyments	(*Ibid*., 135–140)
5.	Pride	Wisdom	Ignorance	(*Ibid*., 188–204)
6.	Vanity	Transcendence/Magnanimity	Excessive humility	(*Ibid*., 149–153)

Table 3 – 'Golden Mean' of six Core Virtues. Descriptions of vices and values to regard as suggestions.

Differing descriptions of virtues can be useful for understanding, as well as preparation of educational interventions, e.g. (Eth. Nic. 1103a14-b32; Baan 2025; Dahlsgaard et al. 2005; Guardini 1967; Havard 2007; Pieper 2004; Snyder 2020). Aristotle does not address Transcendence. Transcendence could be compared to Magnanimity (Eth. Nic. 1125a3-b1). Dahlsgaard et al. (2005, 205) states Humanity may be connected to the virtue of Love, and Transcendence to Hope. While Guardini (1967, 185–200) appears addressing Transcendence as Justice before God. Pieper (2004) extensively addresses cardinal virtues. Whereas, Snyder (2020) provides insights, and information on descriptions originating from other worldviews, i.e. Virtues from the East and West, Ancient and Medieval (ibid., 175–91, and Illustrations of the Tao (ibid., 193–253). By comparing differing descriptions of virtues one adheres to the quest behind decolonising the knowledge as: 1. To learn from each other's backgrounds for the good of mankind (Moncrieffe et al. 2022, 1–4); 2. Highlight the importance of adapting methodological approaches (Moncrieffe et al. 2024, 228–30); as well as 3. Critical reflexivity of epistemological situatedness as decolonial tool is applicable (ibid., 230).

Aristotle advices on defining the Golden Mean (Eth. Nic. 1109a6-b26). Personal affinity is related to what we like, or perceive as pain. Therefore, it appears difficult to pinpoint the Golden Mean. He states, start with defining the vice of defect. Examine the opposites from a major distance of wrongful behaviour. Beware for enjoyable, to make mistakes. This is challenging, especially on how to effectively approach others: how to deviate too much, or too little, and criticised by others, or oneself using self-reflection on behaviour. To what point one may deviate, by a verified principle, to be (self-)reprimanded, appears difficult to determine. Determination concerns individual behaviour, and judgement depends on sensory perception. Sometimes one should lean towards too much and sometimes too little. That is advised to find the appropriate Golden Mean.

Four decolonised transformative reflective approaches connected to Core Virtues

Within educational design research un- or not fully proven, however, critically discussed designs, are executed in educational practice (Gravemeijer and Cobb 2013, 73–75). To some research traditions this appears difficultly to accept. MacIntyre (2023, 15–16) suggests

philosophical imagination to overcome difficulties. Predictability and unpredictability (ibid., 190–91) can be critically (*krinein*) reflected by means of 'conceptual-normative pedagogics' (De Muynck and Kunz 2021, 40–43, 49).

Four decolonised transformative meaning-oriented reflective approaches are connected to the network of six Core Virtues, extending existing interventions, are suggested: A. *MORe3.1.2*+; Tool: B. Moral Dilemma Analytical Tool; C. Serious Literature Tool; D. Traffic Light Tool. The addition is the answer to 'What móre on Meaning-oriented reflection MORe3.1.2?': MORe3.1.2+. This decolonised transformative reflective safe-environment learning tool enables, next to more thorough reflection, an additional advantage. The quest behind 'decolonising the knowledge' is anticipated, as differing definitions, in line with differing worldviews descriptions, are key to *MORe3.1.2*+.

A. *MORe3.1.2*+ *Tool* combines *MORe3.1.2* (Meeuwsen 2024) with descriptions of six Core Virtues. *MORe3.1.2* can be used independently for self-reflection on situations one has, or may go through. The reflectional order of *MORe3.1.2* is: 1. "What is/was the 'Inspiration'?", i.e. 'Sudden thought'; 2. "What did you/do you 'Feel'?", i.e. 'Intuition,' implicit information; and 3. "What did/do you 'Think'?", i.e. 'Logic', 'justification,' using explicit knowledge. These three are thought over within a comprehensive "What did/do you 'Become aware'?" This is fundamental to the final two steps of "What did/do you 'Want'?", and finally "What did you/or are you to 'Do'?" (See Appendix A for the steps, including going 'Backwards' and going 'Forwards', and the continuous feedback-loop on 'Past' & 'Future', i.e. 'Did' and 'Do'.)

Deepening the original tool *MORe3.1.2* is the answer to "What móre on Meaning-oriented reflection *MORe3.1.2*?" Therefore: *MORe3.1.2*+, including the '+'. Now, the interventionist provides descriptions, related to one's own worldview. Herewith, one can be assisted by Aristotle advices on defining the applicable 'Golden Mean' (Eth. Nic. 1109a6-b26). As a result decolonised definitions of the interrelated network of six Core Values are used as parameters for self-reflection. Self-reflection, by using the steps of *MORe3.1.2*, takes place by comparing the past or future subject of reflection to the decolonised described six Core Virtues (i.e. being: *MORe3.1.2*+). As a result, one enables a more thorough and deep transformative reflective learning, and realising a self-motivating 'thrill' (Hattie and Donoghue 2016).

B. *Moral Dilemma Analytical Tool* (Meeuwsen 2023) connects Winkler's (2005) Moral Dilemma Analysis Tool to Pearce II's (2013) Twelve Dilemma Scenarios. The educational design variation suggested is – within the questions of Pearce II on 'ethical' and 'legal' – to add *MORe3.1.2*+. Next to the two axes of 'ethical' and 'legal', 'virtuous' is provided as a third axis. While using Pearce II questions on 'ethical' and 'legal' on 'virtuous' too, a three-dimensional graph can be created. That allows those reflecting to deepen understanding, while addressing their own worldview's Core Virtues.

C. *Serious Literature Tool* (Badarecco 2025) asks students to read and discuss serious literature, instead of traditional case studies. Narratives describe towards making more difficult decisions. The tale provides an "inside view" of a challenge. Two questions are present: What is judgment, and how can we distinguish good judgment from bad judgment?

Badaracco addresses the final question in relation to managerial pluralism: “making high-stakes decisions within a complex web of varied, sometimes incompatible ethical considerations, factual interpretations, and possible plans of action”(ibid.). Interventionists originating from differing worldviews and/or epistemologies can use their own literature, and/or tales. For instance, Indonesian mystery tales as addressed by Tanasyah el al. (2024), or literature by the Nigerian author Okri (1995, e.g. 97–100; 1991/2016, e.g. 240–48). One uses *MORe3.1.2*+ for self-reflection on answers. Thus, in relation to decolonised definitions of the six Core Values.

D. *Traffic Light Tool* (Ribbens 2019), looks at bottlenecks and energy sources in work situation, private life, and in person. He or she works on solutions using eight steps: 1. Traffic light system: red, yellow or green. If red or yellow: Go to step 2. What are bottlenecks and sources of energy? If green, go to step 8; 3. Evaluating and adjusting, while using *MORe3.1.2*+; 4. Conversation/dialogue (idem); 5. Outcome of the conversation and agreements (idem); 6. Evaluating and adjusting (idem); 7. Securing and monitoring what is learned (PDSA-cycle, Deming 2025); 8. Feeling good? Check with *MORe3.1.2*+. Thus, in relation to decolonised definitions of the six Core Values.

Discussion, justification and conclusions

Mankind appears to have difficulties with peacefully living together. Empires came and often went, due to individualistic behaviour (Wiesner-Hanks et al. 2018, 350). Worldviews remain. These have commonalities, like Principle of reciprocity: “Do not do unto others as you would not have done unto you”. Why? To ensure social existence?

MORe3.1.2+ is, next to Aristotle, based on pre-modern virtues ethics by Meister Eckhart (Visser 2018, 22–29), Thomas Aquinas (MacIntyre 2023, 180; Pieper 1958, 191–98), and Bernard of Clairvaux (Aerden 2020, 127–28). Within Aristotle’s teleological system, there is a contrast between man as he happens to be and man as he could be if he realised his essential nature. This system includes three concepts: 1. Unformed human nature; 2. Precepts of rational ethics, which impose various virtues and forbid vices and 3. Human nature as he could be if he could realise his telos. These three must refer to each other. This teaches man to come from his potency to do, in order to indulge true nature and true purpose. When these precepts are not followed, man can become frustrated and incomplete. The attainment of rational happiness, the aspiration of the human species, is then not attainable. Desires and emotions must be arranged and formed using these precepts (MacIntyre 2023, 110–12). To achieve this, man, the learner must actively develop himself, either self-guided, or is educationally assisted during his learning path, i.e. *Bildung*.

As within worldviews cardinal virtues are supplemented by the Core Virtue of Transcendence, connection with spirituality arises (Dahlsgaard 2005). This implies that man’s true purpose in this world cannot be fully achieved, without connection with a transcendent world (MacIntyre 2023, 112). Vos (2023, 89–90) implies an alert, that human beings can try to be as virtuous as possible, but in practice it seems impossible to be perfect. Vos (2020, 151) accentuates mankind ableness to willingly oppose the good, to deliberately sin. According to Thomas Aquinas,

perfection cannot be achieved without primary transcendent reality (Pieper 1958, 194). Mankind must open-up and receive by means of an 'emptied heart' (Meister Eckhart in Visser 2018, 26) or 'expanded heart' (Aerden 2020, 128), by which one gives way to forging connections to the larger universe and thereby provide meaning (Dahlsgaard 2005). Growth and cultivation of virtues can be related to the transcendent power of grace (Vos 2020, 151–54). Aristotle's 'Golden Mean' of the Core Virtue of Transcendence, in order to use Wisdom, and other Core Virtues, like Temperance's humility, in a bonded network-enabled approach of interconnected Core Virtues, supports achieving a goal, objective or aim.

Literature emphasising other epistemologies, other than Enlightenment, is addressed within concepts behind *MORe3.1.2*+, as it is based on educational insights like 'decolonising the knowledge' (Moncrieffe 2022; Moncrieffe 2024). The intervention legitimises the importance of the factors of 1. spirituality (inspiration) and 2. intuition (emotion), next to 3. logic (rationality), within an organisation. While using philosophical imagination to overcome traditions, like the empirical concept of experience (MacIntyre 2023, 153), as well as connecting predictability and unpredictability (ibid., 190–91).

Conclusion

The answer to the article's title "What Móre on Meaning-Oriented-Reflection *MORe3.1.2*?" is *MORe3.1.2*+. This decolonised transformative meaning-oriented safe-learning reflection offers a cross worldviews natural approach, towards the sake of becoming morally aware why one's behaviour virtuously occurs, is evaluated, and proceeded.

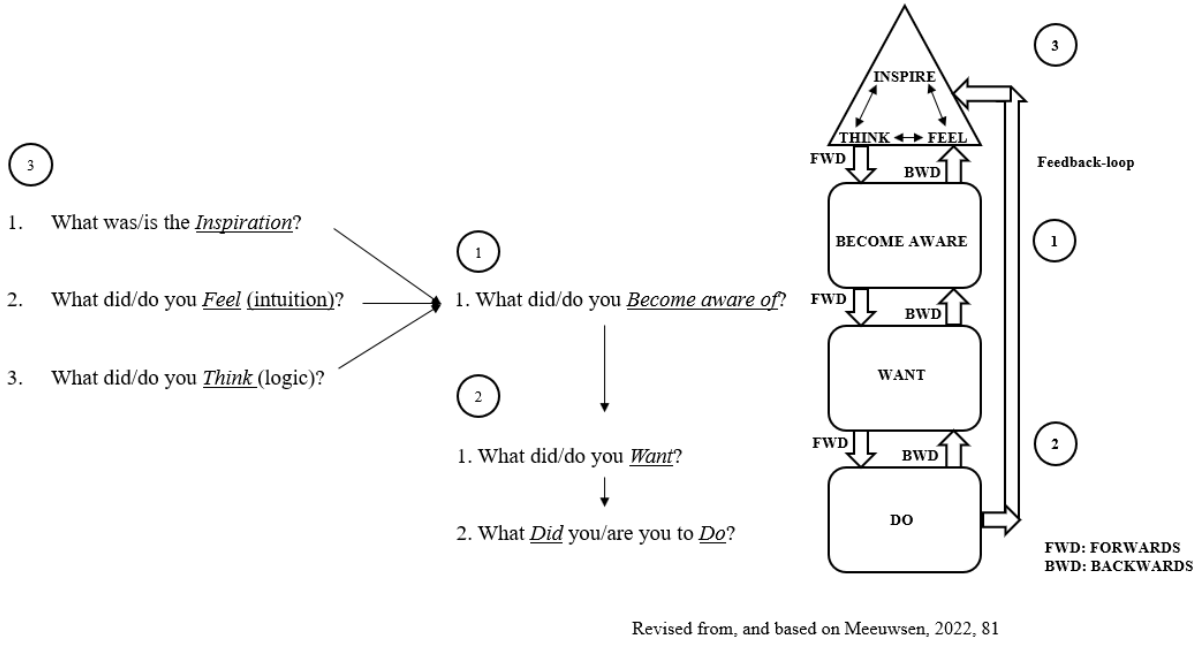
While additional educational design research, and critical reflection by means of 'conceptual-normative pedagogics' on execution of aforementioned interventions in practice remains needed.

Final reflective question for consideration

"What would be the value of reimagination of the purpose of higher education from an international and intercultural perspective?" (Moncrieffe et al. 2024, 231).

Appendix A – Reflection by steps on 'Past' ('Did'), and 'Future'('Do') – 'MORe3.1.2'

Reflection by steps on 'Past' ('Did'), and 'Future'('Do') – 'MORe3.1.2'



Revised from, and based on Meeuwsen, 2022, 81

Two stages: 'Past' & 'Future', i.e. 'Did' and 'Do'

1. One looks at what one 'Did' and reflects on the 'Past' activity. Appear steps 3, or 1, or 2 less clear, one goes backwards (BWD). When aspects are clear, one goes forwards (FWD) again. This BWD and FWD, is like an 'Elevator', until reflection on the 'Past' is concluded. Then, learning is at hand.
2. While one was reflecting on the Past ('Did'), a learning path towards the Future ('Do') commences. With respect to what one wants to 'Do' in the 'Future', steps 3, 1, and 2 are taken. When less clear, use the 'Elevator'. Finally, what to 'Do' in the 'Future' becomes clear.

The feedback-loop on 'Past' & 'Future', i.e. 'Did' and 'Do', continues.

Derived from, and based on Meeuwsen (2022, 81)

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Unity-in-diversity
A framework for aesthetic appreciation in addressing global challenges within and beyond art education

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Abstract
This paper addresses the educational challenges surrounding the teaching of aesthetic engagement in technological societies, where the arts are often overshadowed. It highlights the need for a more comprehensive understanding of aesthetic engagement and proposes a transdisciplinary approach to aesthetic appreciation based on the "unity-in-diversity" framework. This framework aims to foster empathy, inclusivity, and critical reflection. In doing so, it offers a valuable means of addressing global crises in an increasingly technological era.

Keywords
aesthetic engagement; aesthetic appreciation; unity-in-diversity; beauty; aesthetic education; crisis; educational challenges; humanities; arts; sensory awareness; openness; understanding

Humanities and educational challenges in a technological epoch

The origins of the modern school system as we know it today can be dated back to the 18th century. During this period of industrialization, the need to educate a new workforce became fundamental; the emphasis on literacy, numeracy, and technology is not unique to our current epoch. However, in recent decades, political and societal shifts towards prioritizing technology, engineering, and mathematics disciplines and related career paths have resulted in a corresponding decline in the relevance of the humanities. Philosopher of education Laura d'Olimpio highlights that these disciplines have struggled in the system as "a result of attempting to defend their value in narrowly utilitarian terms that increasingly correlate to test scores and achievement in other subjects" (D'Olimpio 2022, 240). In alignment with d'Olimpio, educationalist Marisa Musaio, who worked on the dimension of beauty as a component of educability, also critiques the prevailing trend in education that prioritizes quantifiable technological and instrumental dimensions, while marginalizing the qualitative aspects of learning (Musaio 2013). This concern resonates with the work of Italian philosopher Umberto Galimberti (1999), who examined the implications of living in an *"età della tecnica"* ("epoch of technology") at the end of the previous millennium. Galimberti highlights how technology in an era of rapid societal change has shifted from being a mere auxiliary tool at humanity's disposal to an overarching apparatus governed by the imperatives of efficiency,

productivity, achievement, and functionality. In this Western cultural climate, it is unsurprising that the arts and humanities are increasingly marginalized in favour of a more utilitarian and function-driven approach.

Among all humanities, arts have probably suffered the most. Art education should not solely aim to familiarize students with different forms of art on which they are assessed through objective tests. In a broader sense, aesthetic education entails "the cultivation of aesthetic understanding and imagination through active engagement with visual and performing arts"; this engagement enables individuals to interpret diverse forms of expression and communicate through various modes of representation (Costantino 2015, 230).

One key aspect of aesthetic education is aesthetic appreciation, or the appreciation of beauty, which scholars describe as "the ability to find, recognize, and take pleasure in the existence of goodness in the physical and social worlds" (Peterson and Seligman 2004, 537). Unfortunately, beauty has long suffered from a negative reputation, often dismissed as mere superficiality. As Ramsey Affifi demonstrates, it has been even regarded by some philosophers as a nefarious device:

> "an undeserved privilege; a mechanism of exclusion (Berry, 2008); a tool for social capital (Bourdieu, 1984); an addiction fostered by, and in turn perpetuating neoliberalism (Pow, 2009)" (Affifi 2020, 1127).

Nevertheless, while beauty may be used to propagate harm, this does not necessarily imply that beauty itself is harmful or should be abandoned (Affifi 2020).

In the meantime, we find ourselves in an era marked by profound crisis. The current geopolitical landscape is characterized by instability caused by a seemingly endless array of ongoing conflicts. Climate change threatens the very biodiversity of our planet. Considering such urgent concerns, one might rightfully ask, "Who has the time for arts and aesthetic engagement?" As Ramsey Affifi properly phrased it, "Is beauty important or a luxury distracting from work of great urgency?" (Affifi 2020, 1126).

This article argues that it is essential to recognize the intrinsic value of beauty. It presents a framework for understanding aesthetic appreciation based on the concept of "unity-in-diversity." Rather than providing definitive solutions, the article outlines a potential direction to apply this framework in aesthetic education from a transdisciplinary perspective.

Unity-in-diversity framework

Professor of psychology Rhett Diessner and his colleagues have proposed an intriguing definition of beauty, or at least a key component of it: unity-in-diversity (Diessner et al. 2018). They explain that "unity-in-diversity means that a variety of elements are organized into a meaningful whole. That is, the contents are the diversity and the form is the whole" (Diessner et al. 2018, 378). This definition is also supported by Affifi: "Aesthetic experience of beauty involves perceiving the coherence of the relationship between something and its various parts." (Affifi 2020, 1127). Diessner and his colleagues highlight that "a variety of philosophers, across two and half millennia, consider unity-in-diversity as an important criterion for an experience

of beauty" (Diessner et al. 2018, 379). They cite figures such as Plato, Plotinus, Augustine, Marsilio Ficino, John Dewey, Santayana, Benedetto Croce, and Francis Hutcheson (who most explicitly identifies unity-in-diversity as the cause of beauty). Unity-in-diversity also seems to align with Maxine Greene's "wide-awakeness," a concept that not only involves a deep appreciation and active engagement with diversity but at the same time also "brings forth the recognition of communities, realizing that everyone is in a state of sameness" (Fenech 2023, 41).

The "unity-in-diversity" framework appears to encompass a wide range of sources of aesthetic engagement, including the arts, the natural environment, and ethics. Diessner, et al. illustrates the broadness of this conception of beauty with the example of a forest: when one perceives the beauty of a forest, one observes the harmonious integration of various diverse elements (trees, shrubs, flowers, insects, fungi, and others) into the forest itself as a unified whole (Diessner et. al. 2018). They continue: "Now imagine this forest clear-cut. Its diversity has plummeted, and the form of unity it once had is destroyed; it is now an ugly space" (Diessner et al. 2018, 378). Moral beauty is also inherently acknowledged through the principle of unity-in-diversity (Diessner 2016). This concept offers a vision for social justice, wherein diverse nations and populations collaborate to address complex global challenges while preserving their distinct identities. Such applications suggest that aesthetic appreciation should not be confined solely to aesthetic education but should also be regarded as an activity with a broader scope. Musaio (2013) argues that beauty is not merely a concern of aesthetic theory and critics but is an integral aspect of human nature. Even though the arts remain the primary expression of humanity's aesthetic dimension, Musaio suggests overcoming the idea of an aesthetic education exclusively in connection with artistic education in order to understand the meaning that aesthetics plays in education.

Aesthetic engagement as a participatory act

The unity-in-diversity framework provides a valuable lens through which to understand aesthetic engagement as a participatory and relational act. This relational act is the basis of empathic understanding. Aesthetic engagement is here considered an intentional and immersive experience, one of participatory sense-making that emphasizes the holistic, contextual character of aesthetic appreciation (Brinck 2017; Berleant 2013). This experience has a unity and transcends the subject-object dichotomy (Dewey 1934). Aesthetic engagement acknowledges that beauty or aesthetic value in a broader sense does not reside solely in the object or the perceiver, but emerges as a defining aspect of the reciprocal process of perceptual participation between the viewer and the object (Berleant 2013). Within the unity-in-diversity framework, the observer and the observed are integrated into a single whole, both recognizing this is fundamental for sparking new insights. Aesthetic engagement promotes an alternative mode of thinking and provides tools to address the various aspects of the crisis we are facing (Musaio 2013).

A two-step approach to the framework

How might aesthetic appreciation be integrated into the unity-in-diversity framework? My intention in this discussion is not to provide definitive answers, but rather to propose a few possible steps for applying this framework in educational settings and broader contexts.

The initial step involves cultivating sensory awareness. Drawing upon the earlier example of the forest presented by Diessner and his colleagues, in order to recognize the harmonious integration of various diverse elements into a unified whole, it is essential to engage with the world through the senses. For example, this sensory awareness is cultivated by encouraging students to observe an artwork attentively in the present moment, focusing on experiencing it for what it is rather than immediately interpreting it. The aim is to engage with its colours, shapes, and textures. Drawing upon the work of Denis Dutton (2009), D'Olimpio further emphasises that "human beings are naturally predisposed to appreciate and enjoy beauty, form, shape, texture, colour, line, movement, sound and other aesthetic features of our environment" (D'Olimpio 2022, 240). In this context, sensory awareness aligns with the first level of visual analysis proposed by the semiotician Algirdas Julien Greimas. According to Greimas, when initially engaging with an image, it is essential to direct one's attention to its configuration, or plastic level, focusing on shapes, lines, and colours independent of the content that the image represents. Some will rightfully see a connection between sensory awareness and mindfulness; as defined by Kabat-Zinn, mindfulness is "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment" (Kabat-Zinn 2003, 144). This initial step facilitates a form of embodied engagement, where the aesthetic experience unfolds through the body. In this state of openness, the second step involves nurturing the ability to respond to the stimuli presented at the plastic level and fostering the development of sensibility. At this stage, students are encouraged to explore and reflect upon their emotional responses while observing the entirety of the artwork. This is not merely about identifying feelings. Rather, it is about developing an awareness of how the artwork engages with students' inner state, blending the boundaries between object and subject. Students are encouraged to recognize the nuanced relationship between the aesthetic qualities of the work and their own emotional responses, thereby enriching their overall aesthetic experience. The first step focuses on the details (diversity), and the second step focuses on the whole (unity).

From the micro to the macro level, a thought-provoking approach would be to apply these two steps by first introducing an artwork from a culture unfamiliar to the students, then reflecting on the classroom space, and finally extending the consideration to a public space. Is beauty perceived there? For example, in a civic education setting the unity-in-diversity framework can be applied through a project that invites students to explore their urban environment with fresh eyes. In the first stage, students take sensory walks through different neighbourhoods, observing diverse elements and documenting their emotional responses and aesthetic impressions. In the second stage, students work collaboratively to design a proposal for a public space, integrating their diverse observations into a cohesive vision and exploring how beauty and goodness can emerge from the thoughtful unification of diverse perspectives. Beauty is inherently linked to

the concept of care: what is perceived as beautiful is often considered worth protecting, and the care and attention devoted to something can, in turn, enhance its beauty.
What will happen when applying a beauty-focused approach to other subjects? Affifi (2020) provides an example of a beauty-focused approach to biology:

> "Phytoplankton photosynthesis no longer seems remote and dry when one's beloved whales depend on them. The Calvin cycle may finally take on some urgency when one learns its critical enzymes can be disrupted by heavy metal pollution" (Affifi 2020, 1136).

This example shows the potential of including aesthetic appreciation in fields outside of art education, which can make students more aware of their environment and prompt them to action when their aesthetic appreciation is threatened. Diessner and Niemiec have demonstrated that the personality trait of beauty appreciation exhibits the strongest correlation with pro-environmental behaviours as well as with the prosocial-boosting emotion of elevation. According to their findings, the appreciation of beauty may be the personality trait most likely to foster the behaviours necessary to mitigate the destructive impacts of pollution and climate change (Diessner and Niemiec 2023).
Within this paradigm, the concept of beauty is no longer relegated to abstract ideals but rather becomes more concrete and open to scrutiny. Through aesthetic engagement, we aim to cultivate openness, empathy, and a sincere desire for understanding. One way we share our life experiences is by capturing them through various media. This enables us to share them with others, and "this sharing of experience, rendered aesthetically, unites us, helps us to understand ourselves, one another and the environment in which we exist" (D'Olimpio 2024, 147).

Conclusion

Aesthetic appreciation within this framework is not a global panacea. While the unity-in-diversity framework provides valuable insights into the transformative potential of aesthetic engagement, it is not a cure-all. However, it does offer a meaningful pathway for cultivating a more intentional aesthetic engagement with the world around us. By framing aesthetic appreciation as a relational and participatory experience, the unity-in-diversity framework encourages empathy, awareness, critical reflection, and inclusivity, all of which are necessary for addressing the complex challenges of our time. Ultimately, we may find that aesthetic appreciation serves as a powerful tool for fostering more compassionate and responsive societies.

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Ethics at the Heart of Teaching in Higher Education

Roland Urbain

Abstract
This paper explores the essential role of ethics in teaching, beyond the mere transmission of knowledge and technical competencies. Drawing on Christophe Dejours' definition of work as the gap between prescribed tasks and actual execution, the author argues that teaching involves a deeply human, relational, and ethical dimension. Through personal reflections and real-life examples, the text highlights the importance of empathy, engagement, and personal responsibility. Teaching is portrayed not as a technocratic act, but as a space for intellectual and personal emancipation, where both teacher and student co-construct knowledge within a relationship grounded in respect, care, and critical reflection. The article critiques the utilitarian drift of higher education towards productivity and employability, advocating instead for a pedagogy centered on human development and social responsibility. It calls for a renewed focus on the ethical foundations of education – emphasizing dialogue, empathy, and the nurturing of autonomous, reflective individuals – ultimately positioning ethics as the core of the pedagogical relationship.

Keywords
ethics; education; dialogue; human development; social responsibility; empathy; higher education; pedagogical relationships; limit of the knowledge economy

Introduction

Christophe Dejours defines work as the gap filled between what is prescribed and what is actually carried out to complete a given task (Dejours 2011). The worker is more than a mere executor following a list of tasks codified in a procedure. They personalize their actions, leaving a trace of themselves in the outcomes of their work. They adapt disembodied procedures, imprinting them with their unique approach – so much so that one can recognize in the completed work a style, a particular way of doing things.

Strictly adhering to procedures, by applying them to the letter, hinders the natural flow of daily activity. "Work-to-rule" strikes clearly demonstrate that procedures alone are not enough. They are merely supports that allow work to flourish – they are essential, but not sufficient.

Ethics emerges in this gap and comes to fill it by humanizing work. For instance, preparing a meal tray for a specific patient in a particular unit, with a defined diet and medications, may follow an established procedure. But nothing replaces the smile and warm greeting of the nurse or aide, filled with empathy. That simple human touch – though not codified – makes all the difference.

Professor Blascikova, with whom I had the joy and honor of working in Belgium through an Erasmus program, asked me to present and explain the role of ethics in my teaching practice. I thank her for offering me the opportunity to engage in a reflective and enriching return to my own professional experiences.

The aim of my contribution is to show how important it is not to reduce teaching to the acquisition of job-related skills, but rather to place learning processes – those that address the "How" – within the broader context of a pedagogical relationship from person to person, within which something essential is transmitted: the "Why" of my existence in its commitment to serving the common good.

The core of this reflection is to show how I, as a person, gradually allowed myself to be shaped and unfolded, step by step, along an ethical path.

I will attempt to show that, for me, ethics represents the surplus I allow to emerge between what life offers and how I choose to respond to it through my existence. In this perspective, I will explain why I have never limited my act of teaching to the logic of competence and knowledge transfer – these alone, in my view, are not enough for the process of humanization that is ultimately at stake.

It seems to me crucial not to reduce the soul of the pedagogical relationship to a mere act of knowledge transmission. Something more is required for teaching to truly humanize and serve the common good.

A Student Committed to Ethical Action

Christophe was one of my most memorable students. I share this story as an example of what ethical commitment in action means in the context of the gap mentioned earlier – between what is prescribed and what is actually done.

In the 1990s, companies were beginning to automate their production lines. As part of his internship and final thesis (*Travail de fin d'études*), which marked the end of his engineering program, Christophe was tasked with studying and learning about the operation of a machine. The operators working on the machine supported Christophe by teaching him the trade.

Christophe quickly adapted to his new environment and became passionate about what he was discovering. However, one day he realized that the automation of the work station, which he was learning about from his colleagues, would ultimately lead to job losses for the two people with whom he had developed a strong professional relationship. Christophe was adamant that he did not want to be involved in the "social death" of his colleagues.

He came to me in crisis, expressing his intention to abandon the internship because he could not bear the thought of contributing to the loss of employment for the two people who had been training him. He found it particularly cruel and cynical to extract information from his colleagues that would ultimately cost them their jobs.

My response surprised Christophe. I told him that he should remain in the position for two reasons: first, because the person replacing him – who would study the feasibility of automating the machine – might not have the same sensitivity to the situation and its consequences; second,

because his perspective could raise awareness among decision-makers about the effects he had observed, potentially leading to support measures for the affected workers.
Christophe stayed on and completed his presentation, inviting the company to consider social support measures for the two operators who were going to lose their jobs due to the automation of their workstations.
Christophe was deeply saddened by the response from the company's General Director, who thanked him for the quality of his work and presentation, but noted that his conclusion was not part of the planned agenda for the presentation.
This moment gave me the opportunity to offer Christophe a final lesson:

> "I explained that he had gone as far as he could and should. His actions were valuable because they helped expand awareness, and though he may not have had control over the outcome, his words might have made a difference. Perhaps a member of the management team had pointed out to the Director, 'The young man is right. We should allocate some resources for the retraining of these two employees.'" (Urbain 2015, 35).

The artisan in philosophy helps to expand consciousness through the questioning they provoke and the questions they formulate. They do not provide ready-made, definitive answers once and for all.
In the surplus mentioned above, ethics consists of receiving the questions, allowing them to resonate deeply within my being, and acting accordingly based on the means available.
This leads me to discuss the way in which I have shaped my professional career by placing the person at the center and, in doing so, grounding my teaching practice in ethical concern.

Ethics as the foundation of the teaching relationship

The prescribed task of teaching is the transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the student, who initially lacks it. This prescription is built on a pedagogical relationship marked by asymmetry.
I have attended lessons given by teachers whose professional posture was shaped by such a prescription. I don't recall much from those sessions, as they were delivered with polite detachment.
On the other hand, I learned and retained much from the teachers who were true "Masters," not only because of the rich content they shared, which stemmed from their own research, but also because of their attitude in transmitting their knowledge, enriched by their personal experiences. These Masters were deeply engaged in their pedagogy. They left a mark on us students through their respect for us, their empathy, and their kindness. They accompanied us throughout our intellectual development.
As Paul Ricoeur states, these teachers offered a pedagogical relationship imbued with solicitude – one in which they concerned themselves with our growth while encouraging our independence (Ricoeur 1990).

I fully embraced this teaching posture, which regards the student as an active participant in their education. This positions the teacher between high expectations and kindness, thereby demanding an ethical stance grounded in respect for the student's autonomy.
Philippe Meirieu has shown that teaching is not simply about transmitting knowledge but about fostering intellectual emancipation (Meirieu 1991).

The Limits of a Strictly Administrative or Technical Approach

The logic of solicitude, as described by Paul Ricoeur, is neither shared nor practiced by all.
Higher education has often evolved toward a paradigm of the "knowledge economy." This is an economic model in which the production and distribution of wealth are primarily based on the creation, dissemination, and use of knowledge. The competencies acquired by students must be immediately applicable in the workforce (Nussbaum 2010).
Operational efficiency takes precedence over critical reflection.
Indeed, preparing competent professionals is an important mission of higher education, but the teaching of competencies requires an ethical framework: who decides which competencies should be taught, for what purpose, and with what social consequences? It is important to avoid the instrumentalization of knowledge for purely economic or technocratic purposes.
Instead, the goal should be to educate responsible citizens who can think critically and understand the world. Universities cannot simply serve a utilitarian function (Habermas 1981). It must be a space for reflection and debate, where students remain, or become, independent thinkers.
The risk of a technocratic approach to teaching is that it may strip the pedagogical relationship between teacher and student of its substance, ultimately dehumanizing it.
Teaching is inherently a human relationship, through which something essential is transmitted from person to person. Pedagogy cannot be reduced to a mere system for transmitting knowledge; it involves a lively interaction between teacher and student (Meirieu 2007).
Certainly, the contexts of higher education do not always favor the development of the person-to-person pedagogical relationship: teachers are often caught between their mass lectures, their research, their publications, not to mention the development of various projects and the race for funding.
However, nothing prevents these overburdened teachers, who are constantly racing against time, from dedicating moments during their courses – during which they are anyway occupied – to encourage students before an exam, to be attentive to the questions raised and provide answers during summaries, to greet the audience at the beginning of a course, thus showing empathy, to offer office hours once or twice a month to address any questions, and to listen, understand, and support students who seek help.
Ethics remains possible despite the often challenging conditions.

Towards an Ethics of Pedagogical Commitment

The ethical approach is essential in higher education.

The challenge is to ensure that universities remain places of intellectual emancipation and not merely factories for producing skills. Beyond the purely technical aspect of the profession, the aim for students is to become autonomous and to continue their intellectual development, enabling them to think and reflect in a fair and thoughtful manner.

I identify in what follows three key moments of an ethics-in-action within my teaching practice.

First of all, I have never been able to deliver a course independently of my audience. I needed to feel engaged in an interaction with the students.

It often happened that I would stop the lecture if I felt there was no response, and I would then ask the students what was wrong – ranging from disengagement due to a lack of understanding of the material to other issues they were experiencing. We would address these issues together before continuing with renewed energy.

In the same spirit, attention to the realities experienced by students, the empathy shown, and the search for solutions to problems raised during office hours embeds teaching within a pedagogical relationship that goes beyond the simple transmission of knowledge.

This consideration for the other in the pedagogical relationship resembles what Joan Tronto calls the "ethics of care," which emphasizes attention to the needs of others and responsibility toward them (Tronto 1993). Teaching thus becomes a form of support that takes into account the real-life situations experienced by students.

Next, it is important to take into account the place and role of the participants in the pedagogical relationship.

First, the teacher, who serves as a reference point – even a model – for the students.

Through their attitude, pedagogical choices, and way of managing classroom debates, the teacher embodies a certain ethics of knowledge. They accompany and guide the production of knowledge by demonstrating how to think, how to doubt, and how to construct a line of reasoning. They set the boundaries for the dissemination and use of that knowledge.

Language plays a key role in the construction of knowledge. It enables dialogue among the involved and concerned participants, within which viewpoints are expressed and argued, defined and evaluated, and brought into interaction with others. Each participant is respected in their right to speak. Everyone learns to listen, to speak, and to confront their ideas with those of others.

Then, the student, who must engage in the process of constructing knowledge, gradually making it their own, moving from reproducing what is received to producing what they propose. This transition from reproduction to production of knowledge can only be successful if the student links the process of their intellectual maturation to the development of their personal maturation.

Such argumentative exchanges are a site for what Habermas (1981) developed as the ethics of discussion.

I have always encouraged the students I've worked with to connect their personal and professional projects and to consider the concrete ways to carry them out – what I call an

existential or life project. If there is dissonance, a person torn in two directions will struggle to hold together.

Weaving the thread of one's life, telling or writing one's story contributes to the emergence and unfolding of the unique being that I am. MacIntyre, the initiator of narrative ethics, has clearly shown the importance of such a process (MacIntyre 1981).

It is also necessary to consider the ethical evaluation of the content exchanged among the involved actors.

Thus, the content taught must avoid ideological, political, or religious bias. It must reflect cultural, social, and gender diversity. Moreover, it must promote values such as freedom, equality, human dignity, and solidarity.

It is important to articulate each participant's representations and to recognize that every point of view is situated and shaped by ideology, and by political, social, cultural, or religious affiliation.

Science is partisan, as Gérard Fourez once said (Fourez 1974); it is constructed based on a selection of useful elements. The map of a single territory differs depending on whether it is drawn for a hiker, a soldier, a traveling salesperson, a lover of Romanesque architecture, or a gourmet seeking the best places to eat.

Gérard Fourez recounted the experience of a student coming into his office and asserting that science is objective. He used the example of geography, his own field: "There is only one way to do geography," he claimed, throwing his textbook onto the desk. Fourez leafed through it and pointed out that it contained no photos of slums – the author of the textbook presented the capitals only through their most beautiful neighborhoods.

Finally, assessment involves an ethical responsibility. It is important to clearly define its meaning.

First and foremost, it is a technical act that measures the acquisition and integration of knowledge. It is essential: a bricklayer must be able to place the bricks in the right spot, and an engineer must be confident in their calculations so that the bridge does not collapse. There is a duty to do things properly for all involved – from the teacher, who must first ensure that the essential knowledge is transmitted and acquired, to the student, who must become an honest and responsible professional.

Assessment is also a continuous form of support that goes beyond measuring final performance; it tracks the learner's progress, efforts, strengths, weaknesses, achievements, and shortcomings. Assessment is fair when it is the result of both continuous and final evaluation. It is ethical when it is based on a balance between rigor and kindness, within a framework of educational justice (Dubet 2010).

Conclusion

My decision-makers often told me that I was too close to my students.

It's true that I have always preferred to build knowledge with them rather than impose ready-made content on my audience. I also took into account the personal stories they were willing to

share with me, situating their learning progress in relation to their projects – what they wanted to build and achieve.

I very often linked my assessment with their self-assessment, sometimes even having to fight to raise a grade, as students were often harsher on themselves than I was, applying more numerous evaluation criteria. These students had truly understood the process and gradually became more active participants in their own education. They were learning how to learn to learn, thus investing in their personal and professional futures. Others clung to their school-age habits and remained on the sidelines. I would sometimes provoke them by calling them "executor students."

Thus, I have never reduced pedagogy to a mere administration of learning. I have always integrated the human and relational dimension that, in my view, is the foundation of education. I have always regarded higher education as a place of intellectual emancipation, not simply a factory for producing skills.

I fully stand by this approach and do not regret it in the least.

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Editorial

The Pursuit of Truth and Education

Zuzana Svobodová

> "Above all, the search after truth and its eager pursuit are peculiar to man. And so, when we have leisure from the demands of business cares, we are eager to see, to hear, to learn something new, and we esteem a desire to know the secrets or wonders of creation as indispensable to a happy life. Thus we come to understand that what is true, simple, and genuine appeals most strongly to a man's nature. To this passion for discovering truth there is added a hungering, as it were, for independence, so that a mind well-moulded by Nature is unwilling to be subject to anybody save one who gives rules of conduct or is a teacher of truth or who, for the general good, rules according to justice and law. From this attitude come greatness of soul and a sense of superiority to worldly conditions."
>
> (Cicero, De off. I, 4)

These words are dedicated by a father to his son, by an educator to his educatee. Cicero entrusted them to his son Marcus, who studied in Athens, with the aim of growing into a man capable of speaking and acting correctly. His son was urgently reminded that the main goal is to act honestly (Lat. *honestum*), even if no one praises him for it ("it merits praise, even though it be praised by none").

On the one hand, it refers to the significant human feature (Lat. *primisque hominis*) of searching and pursuing the truth, and on the other hand, it refers to cultural, cultivated virtuous, honorable behavior that is not derived from the opinions of others, but is related to beauty, integrity, purity, or decency, with order in thoughts and actions. On the one hand, there is a kind of natural inclination that leads people to seek and investigate (Lat. *inquisitio atque investigatio*) the truth; on the other hand, there is the effort of (self-)education to act honestly. Both of these "hands" must, of course, work together; truth and education belong together, they must act in concert, in unison.

If we cease to perceive human beings as striving for truth and speak of today's world as a post-truth era, then education is also in danger of becoming indoctrination rather than an effort to act honorably. What is generally recognized and praised here and now may not be a virtue. If the true form and face of virtue could be seen with the eyes, it would inspire an amazing love (Lat. *mirabiles amores*) of wisdom ("a marvellous love of wisdom" – De off. I, 5), Cicero recalls Plato's idea (Phaedr. 205d). Cicero wants to write to his son about this love of wisdom, so that it may become the guiding principle of his entire life. It is because of this love of wisdom that we also publish our journal *Theology and Philosophy of Education*.

We are pleased to offer articles in this issue by authors who pursue the truth and seek the face of virtue, motivated by a love of wisdom.

In the article "The Teacher as an Authority: Between Heracles and Gregor Samsa," Michal Černý examines two models of authority from a philosophy of education perspective. Justin Nicholas Micallef provides a theological and philosophical inquiry into integral human development in the educational vision of Pope Francis. Jeffrey Ober introduces internal and external applications of modern apologetics. How church space didactics fosters deeper religious literacy and sustainable, reflective learning is explained in the article, "Churches as School Learning Spaces – Perspectives on Didactics of Sacred Spaces," by Rudolf Sitzberger. In her article, Michaela Pachelová highlights the influence of teachers' values and personal beliefs on their resilience against burnout. Writing about supporting children of re-emigrant families in Polish schools, Anna Sarbiewska argues that recognizing students' multilingual competencies can be a pedagogical response to learning difficulties. In the section of discussion, Roland Urbain advocates a form of teaching that, beyond the acquisition of competencies, also emphasizes the possibilities of inner transformation and individuation of students.

Dear readers of *Theology and Philosophy of Education*, I wish you a marvellous love of wisdom by your pursuit of truth and (self-)education,

Zuzana Svobodová

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The Teacher as an Authority: Between Heracles and Gregor Samsa

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Abstract
This study analyses two models of authority in the perspective of philosophy of education – one associated with the Herculean myth and its romantic re-reading, and the other with Latour's interpretation of Gregor Samsa concerning teaching. The study analyses two models of authority and attempts to point out a particular crisis in the understanding of authority in the context of critical perceptions of modernity.

Keywords
Latour; Kafka; Heracles; myths; authority; romanticism; education; philosophy of education

Introduction

This study focuses on deconstructing the understanding of the teacher as an isolated authority, which is supposed to be a kind of romantic reading of the Greek hero who alone overcomes all the difficulties and saves the world. He contrasts it with the notion associated with Latour and his interpretation of Gregor Samsa (Kafka 2009), who can radically change perspective but cannot save the world (Latour 2021, 2). The theorem that the teacher should be the authority is rarely challenged publicly (Elliott 2009). This problem is analysed from the perspective of the philosophy of education.

The Christian concept of the teacher is often worked with as an ideal and archetype of Jesus Christ as teacher and authority. A good teacher should be like him, and although such an ideal is impossible to achieve, it is essential to strive for it. This model took a strong shape in the 18th and, mainly, 19th centuries and represented a specific ideal model of the catechist.

Against this model, we can contrast the second Weberian ideal type, namely the Gregor Samsa from Kafka's novel *The Metamorphosis*, which is interpreted in a specific way by Latour (2021). This model anticipates the need for a radical change of perspective, abandoning some traditional ideas about how and what teaching in schools is constituted (Šíp 2019, 55–7), and a fundamental transformation of what it means to be an authority. While for the first conception, which we will refer to in this study as Herculean, it is a fundamental identity-shaping principle of the educator, it is almost dangerous in the second conception (the Gregorian).

The connection with the technological revolution (Floridi 2014, 167–8; Benedikter and Fathi 2021), with a change in the concept of authority, will be essential to our study, which has transformed the world in which education occurs and can occur. We want to emphasise at this point that this is a discourse systematically developed by Pope Francis and followed by Pope Leo XIV. (Francis 2024; Cernuzio 2025). Both popes speak of the transformation of the world in the context of the technological revolution, which has brought about change in the realm of technology and transformed the entire social reality. Technologies are accelerating and changing the world's complexity, dynamics, and globalisation, so seeking new forms of conceptualising the phenomenon of authority is necessary.

The Herculean model

Typical of Near Eastern mythology are the narratives of heroic epics, in which we can see several dominant characteristics, the explication of which is essential to this analysis. The roles of the heroes feature personalities endowed with divine strength or power, but at the same time, possessing specific human characteristics. Thus, Gilgamesh is two-thirds god and one-third human; Achilles (Ἀχιλλεύς) is invulnerable beyond the heel; Heracles (Ἡρακλῆς) is the son of Zeus and Alcmene. This structure of a certain partial divinization is essential.

As Skalický points out, if we analyse the psychological narratives that justify the existence of religion, the dimension of the superiority and subordination of man will be present in them (Skalický 2003, 158–60). It is essential to these mythological narratives that the divine qualities of the hero enable him to perform great heroic acts (Stuhlemer 2017). These great deeds are subsequently the source of their authority and respect. It is essential to point out that many of these narratives are conceived as a form of challenging comfort and formal order (Gilgamesh becomes famous when he exceeds the expectations of his office, Heracles must deal with the challenges of Eurystheus). Authority consists of performing heroic deeds against the banal world's ordinary order. Heracles, after all, is the only one who can join the gods on Olympus. In Christian terms, we might say that he sleeps himself. Self-salvation and self-assertion lie at the heart of this myth.

Thus, one becomes a good person or authority in three steps:

1) Deification, in a process of a certain divinization, in which he acquires an aspect of power and glory that is inseparable from society. The key point is that with this type of hero, it is not easy to say why they are heroes or to emulate their achievement; they are unique through a form of favour from the gods that is rationally unavailable and unanalysable. In the modern narrative, we would speak here of the presence of a particular personal charm or charisma that is unavailable to others, unearned and impossible to possess.

2) Individual acceptance of a task, the performance of great miracles, and commitment. *Heroic virtue* is linked to the actual construction of the myth in which the individual overcoming obstacles and achieving a goal is the focus. Heroic epics do not question the existence of a readily available single explicit goal to be achieved; in principle,

everything is clear from the outset and at the same time, set up to be just beyond the capabilities of the ordinary person.

3) Isolation plays a crucial role in Greek mythology; it can be from the rejection of the environment, betrayal or just one's own story. The key point, however, is that the hero does not need anyone to achieve his goal. The goal is his own; it is what he possesses, what is within his power to achieve.

Such a construction of authority is strongly reflected in teachers' ideas as authorities in the period since the beginning of Romanticism. Romanticism returns to Greek mythology and rediscovers a hero who must be followed. That or whether one perishes is not important; what is crucial is a form of κένωσις and self-sacrifice, an inner turmoil and emotional outburst to accomplish the task. In this educational understanding, one often sees that the teacher should be a role model and that teaching is not a job but a mission. After all, the word mission in German (Mission), Italian (missione), Swedish (uppdrag), Greek (αποστολή) and other languages refers to some external (divine) justification for action that cannot be avoided, as the biblical story of Jonah demonstrates.

In the context of the philosophy of education, the key message of this perspective is this: education aims to find a specific mission, to profile a uniquely autonomous personality equipped to overcome obstacles to achieve its life mission. Problems or obstacles in the world are only certain retarders that slow down the process of reaching the goal. Authenticity here lies in achieving an external, enduring, explicit goal. The good life does not take great account of the self and one's needs and emotions (psychologically, we can see here a form of disconnection from experience), but of the heroic virtues that lead to achieving predetermined goals.

This conception has many advantages, which are strongly represented in the educational landscape. First, it simplifies a world that has become illegible and opaque to many people through its complexity (Beck 2009, 76–80). This model allows both to accept authorities that can be followed and trusted, and makes available simple solutions and an externally constructed task. This means that on the one hand, it places high demands on the person ("do not sulk, do not complain, and do not work"), but at the same time, it essentially absolves the person of responsibility. Thus, we can see the same mental structure that Pope Francis referred to as clericalistic in the Church, albeit sometimes with less power-discursive factors (Loffeld 2024, 138–43).

This model also encounters significant limits – our world is complex and complicated. The notion of an individual heroically solving climate change or geopolitical tensions alone is nonsensical (Bělohradský 2021, 290–8, 320–5). The fixation on the actions of the individual and isolated acts as expressions of heroism fundamentally mismatches the reality of the world we inhabit. As Bauman points out, many former virtues are today's vices and therefore do not reflect the complexity and mutability of (Bauman 2013).

Real problems can only be solved by deep collaboration with a willingness to rethink one's views, attitudes and practices. The significant ethical challenges of the contemporary world are

not solvable at the individual level but are social. This does not mean that the individual does not matter, but rather that predetermined goals and individualistic ethics do not lead to results, but are maladaptive behaviours. However, we are likely to ask what the authority of a teacher should look like. In that case, many of the population will demand just a Heraclean teacher.

The Gregor Samsa model

Bruno Latour offers a fundamentally different model when he retells Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (Kafka 2009). Latour says that we have come to see the transformed Gregor Samsa as an anomaly that does not belong in the world. To cease to be human and become a bug does not belong in the order of things. The family proceeds by locking Gregor in a room, trying to hide him from the eyes of the world, hoping that something will change, that he will come back to his senses.

Latour says that we mostly read this narrative as the family being the "normal" one and Gregor being the "weird" one who should be normalised or pushed out of the public space. The situation is different, says Latour – the world we inhabit has changed so much since the emergence of modernity that transformation is the only thing that makes sense. We must change ways of looking at the world, perspective, ontological models, and narratives; we must not remain trapped in mental models that no longer apply and cannot apply today. Gregor's family is getting worse, crisis piles on crisis, but the parents will not ask themselves whether they should change too; they would rather live in a culture of decline than radically question the need for ontological transformation (Latour 2021, chap. 1).

The fact that Gregor climbs the ceiling and leaves a trail behind him is not an ornament of the story. Gregor must undergo an ontological transformation and view the world differently. Crucially, he does not force anyone else to transform; he merely offers his example and authenticity as a path of reciprocity and search. This bug needs others; without them, it will die. This transformation is driven by the need for a different perspective on authority in a changing world (due to technology). We are facing problems – hyperobjects (Bělohradský 2021, 290–8) – that we cannot respond meaningfully using traditional forms of authority.

Gregor did not choose his task, nor was it handed to him by the gods; he did not do it alone. His story is the story of a form of critical reflection on banality (framed in Kafka's form of employment), which at some point proves to be completely untenable. Gregor does not shout; he has no heroic virtue; he invites a change of perspective (μετάνοια).

In the Christian tradition, μετάνοια is often interpreted in a fundamentally simplistic way – it is supposed to be a rejection of the bad life and an embrace of the new good one. John the Baptist is key to understanding what μετάνοια is; he does not tell people what to do after being immersed in the Jordan. John is a prophet of critical discernment, of judging the present life, and the future is the task here that all Israel has in common. A prophet is never a prophet for himself – even the least accepted – his relationship to the people constitutes Jeremiah's identity. The goal of the prophet is the conversion of the people.

The Hebrew term navi (נָבִיא) refers to the interaction of humans and God; the prophet is seen as if he were only a mediator. Honesty in mediation measures the authenticity and purity of the

prophet. It is characteristic of the Jewish tradition that the rabbi does not typically assume the role of the analyst, nor does he relinquish his position as an authority figure. Instead, he is known to employ a method of inquiry that involves posing questions or presenting riddles. The notion of truth is not objectifiable in itself; instead, it is revealed through lived experience and a sincere pursuit of truth, which is not the exclusive domain of authority. This perspective is typical of Kafka and his works.

Pope Francis spoke of the relationship between education and critical thinking (Francesco 2024). We believe he was emphasising precisely this capacity of διάκριση to be able to assess a situation from a perspective other than that of a particular self-narrative. Critical thinking does not cling to one view or perspective but considers and assesses multiple options, a counterpart to the linearity of being in the Heraclean narrative. Such a procedure relativises the easy (a priori) constituted categories to some extent. Meaning emerges in which one has a stake. Vocation is not a question of the external voice of God, but of authenticity to oneself.

It should be noted that Latour's Christian intellectual background is reflected in his conception of authority, as discussed by Gregory Samsa. In contrast, Kafka's work is inspired by Judaism. The concept of authority in their field completely differs from how it was conceived in Greek mythology. Rather than drawing attention to itself, authority shows the way to others. Like an isolated romantic hero, it is not isolated but refers beyond its ego and interests.

An authority that suddenly cannot be a tool for simplifying or making the world more transparent does not have ready-made solutions, nor does it create the traditional model of certainty that is usually expected of educational practice in psychological and pedagogical contexts. It can be argued that an essential feature of Christianity is uncertainty – a belief or trust in one's ability to discern, seek, find, fall, and give up – but this is often not easily grasped in the space of the school (Groot 2006). Thus, key critiques will come both from positions of efficacy and the psychology of certainty, but also from critiques directed towards a form of elitism.

This model relies heavily on a consistent trinitarian concept – Jesus is always acting in the Spirit with the Father, emphasising that he is doing the Father's will, that whoever sees him sees the Father. Jesus thus does not appear as "de deo uno" but as the Son, assuming relationality with the Father. This relationality is dynamic and linked to the transformation that made the incarnation possible. The act of σάρκωσις presupposes a dynamic movement of change. The Spirit "blows where it will" (John 3:8) as it manifests the life of the Trinity.

Conclusion

The transformation of authority in a technologized and complex world is a central theme in the philosophy and theology of education. Conversely, it is noteworthy that these phenomena receive comparatively scant attention within this theoretical framework. The present study proffered a particular conceptualisation of teacher authority, exemplified by two Weberian archetypes: a model associated with the charismatic personality of Heracles. He conceptualises authority as an undeserved external gift that rightfully belongs to him as a person who leads

others. A leader of this kind must be able to make decisions and offer solutions that are easy to understand. In contemporary society, undergoing a significant transformation, he proffers a paradigm of a more straightforward and more comprehensible world, wherein individuals can ascertain their place through his charisma and to which they can allocate (part of) their responsibility.

The second type is Gregor Samsa, an authority striving for transformation, change, and critical discernment. This form of authority is not driven by personal ambition or the pursuit of individual recognition. Instead, it is characterised by a commitment to facilitating a collective exploration, rather than imposing a definitive solution. The concept of authority in this context does not signify a personal endowment. Still, it is a social role that aims to facilitate a pivotal moment in modern society: the emancipation of the individual, their authenticity, and their responsibility to the collective.

This analysis has demonstrated that, despite the first type being strongly favoured in society as a political leader and educator, its conceptualisation does not permit it to respond to the demands of the complex world we currently find ourselves in. Romanticism represents a highly productive form of narrative. However, a narrative that constructs the world with too high a degree of simplification to work with it in education. It is the task of teachers to change this authoritarian paradigm, because only if they can abandon it, if they gain the courage not to be Heracles, can their educational action be meaningful, leading to the formation of autonomous, critically reflective democratic citizens who are aware of their fragmentation and grow into the whole of humanity.

The fundamental question pertains to the potential for these two ideal types to cooperate or complement each other. It is hypothesised that, to a certain extent, this is indeed the case. Such cooperation necessarily implies the ability to distinguish and identify elements or specific time slots that require Heracles. Concurrently, it permits the cultivation of a more expansive perspective and the capacity to engage with hyperobjects, as facilitated by Gregor. The second question pertains to Hercules's capacity to maintain his identity within such an arrangement and whether the expulsion of this kind of individualistic authority signifies its internal decomposition. Nevertheless, this question must be left to psychological rather than philosophical (philosophy of education) considerations.

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Integral Human Development in the Educational Vision of Pope Francis: A Theological and Philosophical Inquiry

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Abstract
This article engages the distinctive educational vision of Pope Francis, placing it within the broader theological and philosophical framework of integral human development. By interpreting the complementary scriptural, magisterial, and philosophical strands that inform the pontiff's reflection – especially the central loci of Catholic social doctrine, personalist thought, and recent papal exhortations – the examination reveals that the recent ascendancy of technocratic rationality has noticeably attenuated the authenticity of contemporary educational practice. Consequently, a more comprehensive and intercipient model of human formation is warranted. The resulting pedagogical paradigm is conceived as a praxis that is at once moral and spiritual, which aspires to engender persons endowed with a reflective consciousness of solidarity, a disposition toward the global common good, and a sustained attentiveness to transcendent horizons. By articulating the exigencies that this vision entails, the inquiry further discerns several concrete paths toward worldwide educational renewal. The suggested reform agenda is thereby assigned not merely to the purview of Catholic institutions, but is equally pertinent to secular educational frameworks and to interconfessional collaborative projects that endeavour to cultivate a genuinely human centre of formation.

Keywords
Pope Francis; integral human development; education; integrity; Catholic education; technocratic paradigm; personalism; Global Compact on Education; educational philosophy

Introduction

Across diverse educational contexts worldwide, recent evidence indicates that schooling currently confronts a profound crisis regarding its underlying purpose and sense of direction (Taylor 2007, 715). Although institutions remain adept at delivering the technical competencies associated with formal accreditation, they devote inadequate energy to the formation of character among graduates. The prevailing focus on measurable performance indicators, operational efficiency, and short-term economic yields has gradually crowded out the patient, individualized labor essential to the cultivation of a discerning awareness of truth and goodness, the will to act according to that discernment, and the growth of personal integrity (Francis 2015, §109–10).

This reconfigured educational view has elicited serious apprehension from Pope Francis, who asserts that schooling must be understood not simply as a means to economic ascent, but as a purposeful, transformative journey leading to integral human development (Francis 2019). Although the notion appears in earlier magisterial texts such as *Populorum Progressio* (Paul VI 1967) and *Caritas in Veritate* (Benedict XVI 2009), Francis gives it such urgency and comprehensive dimension that it acquires immediate significance. The Holy Father's vision insists upon holistic human formation, defining the authentic educational enterprise as one that interweaves relational competence (Gilligan 1982; Noddings 2013), eco-responsibility (Francis 2015, §138), and spiritual depth in one inseparable process (De Souza 2016, 267).
Papal discourse on education – including the 2019 Global Compact – exhibits a conception of pedagogy predicated on a mutual social obligation rather than a sole commitment of the learner. The Compact summons teachers, families, neighbourhoods, and state apparatuses not merely to advise but to assist concertedly in advancing an integral anthropology, and furthermore so to do within particular communities, thus rendering pedagogical activity relational rather than merely instrumental. The argument foregrounds a concise appraisal of the mutual entanglement – an idea sturdily endorsed by McDonough – between pedagogy and communal life, patent in McDonough's observation about relational authenticity (2014, 122).

Theological Foundations of Integral Human Development

Integral human development represents a conceptual cornerstone of Catholic social teaching, countering predominant reductions that confine the human person to variables of economy or polity (Hittinger 2003, 45–62). The doctrine crystallized with definitive clarity in Paul VI's 1967 encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*, which reconceived development as, in the encyclical's phrase, the progress of "each man and the whole man" (Paul VI 1967, §14, 8–9). On this anthropological horizon, education, productive labor, cultural life, and the formation of the spirit are not secondary additives but constitutive of the authentic human good, a beauty that mirrors the primordial dignity of the person, as expressed in both the scriptural *imago* (Genesis 1:27) and the later magisterial synthesis (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1994, §1702–6).
Pope Francis has intensified the theological impulse toward developmental anthropology by directly engaging the relational ontology of Christian personhood (Francis 2020, §95, 134–5). For the Holy Father, human dignity is inextricably bound to the dynamic of communion – vertical toward the Creator, horizontal among human siblings, and lateral with the created world. His Trinitarian ecclesiology thus distils a relational vision that suffuses his entire magisterial corpus, most concertedly in *Laudato Si'*, where, invoking the Canticle of the Creatures, he affirms that "everything is interconnected" (Francis 2015, §138, 102). Grounded in this ontology, human formation repudicates any paradigm of solitary development and can occur only in symphonic exchanges that mirror the perichoresis of the Trinity, thereby enacting the logic of the family of creation.

Within this theological horizon, vocational catechesis exerts a decisive pedagogical gravitational force in Francis's reflective project. The encyclicals repeatedly assert that persons – not discrete, self-sufficient subjects, but neighbours summoned to mutual gift – embody a vocation of brotherhood that exceeds any lived autonomy (Francis 2020, §95, 134–5). Accordingly, pedagogy ceases to be simple information transfer; it becomes a sacramental escort toward the vocation that the Creator inscribed in the very fabric of the learner's identity. Authentic formation – asin the vision animating the *Ratio Institutionis* of the Society of Jesus – consists in a magisterial and ministerial process wherein educator and learner advance together toward the fulfillment that God conceives for each (International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education 1993, 11–4). From this perspective, the act of being taught and the act of teaching acquire a ritual quality, deriving ethical and spiritual force from the recognition that every person is *imago Trinitatis* and *invenientis cum necessitate vocationis*.

Biblical witnesses offer a compelling foundation for the proposed educational purpose. In the creation narrative, humanity appears not as a surplus observer of divine craftsmanship but as steward, commissioned to cultivate and protect the created order (Gen 2:15; cf. Balthasar 1975, 115–20). Charting the trajectory of instruction across the canon, we observe the formative movement: the transit of Israel is an exercise of pedagogical purification (Deut 8:2-3; Hos 2:14-15), the incarnate Word teaches as Torah made flesh and tending shepherd (Matt 5:1-2; Jn 10:11-16), and the nascent Christian at once practices and addresses the communal imperative of justice and love (Acts 2:42-47; 1 Jn 4:7-21). The narrative thus secures a transmitable epiphany which conclusively intertwines spiritual formation and educational labour (Groome 2011, 134–56). Consequently, the demand for human flourishing as holistic labour is not a speculative opinium, but a faith-concerted praxis that emerges from the disclosure of God's covenant history.

Lastly, Francis inscribes the agenda of integral human development within the wider missionary programme of the Church. The exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* categorically postulates that announcing the Kingdom and enacting human advancement are simply the same revolutionary motion: "An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives" (Francis 2013, §24, 20). Therefore, the missionary perspective precludes educational neutrality; rather, the pedagogical effort is conscripted into the Church's imperative, collaboratively witnessing to and embodying a world progressively oriented toward justice, compassion, and fulfillable hope for the human family (Congregation for Catholic Education 2017, 12–8).

Critique of the Technocratic Paradigm

Francis's critique of contemporary education rests upon his detailed explication of what he identifies as the "technocratic paradigm", a governing intellectual structure that subsumes the entirety of reality under the regimes of quantification, manipulability, and profitability (Francis 2015, §106–14). He contends that, by permeating the economic, political, and now the pedagogic sphere, the paradigm transfigures human beings into mere consumers and operational vectors within the production system (Francis 2015, §109, 78). Within the school,

the paradigm reveals itself most clearly in the cult of standardized assessment, a utilitarian programme of studies that prizes immediate fiscal return over the humanistic and the spiritual, and in the relegation of philosophy, theology, and the arts to the periphery, despite their capability to elicit wisdom over mere technical efficacy (Taylor 2007, 475–504).

Under the direction of such thought, educational institutions cede their original purpose to the mandate of economic instrumentation and become, instead, facilitating agencies of market success rather than sites wherein wisdom, ethical character, and self-critical understanding may mature (Francis 2015, §110, 79). Accordingly, "the fragmentation of knowledge proves incapable of producing meaning in the lives of young people" (Francis 2015, §110, 79). These institutions may therefore – by perpetual training in narrowly defined skill sets – generate competent operators yet deprive the subject of comprehensive wisdom, ethical deliberation, and the contemplative richness that constitute true human fulfilment (Guardini 1998, 70–7; Lonergan 1990, 231–44).

The anthropological consequences of technocratic education elevate concern for Francis. Reduction to technological or economic metrics yields a diminished reading of the human. Catholic tradition – from medieval scholasticism through to contemporary personalism – attests to the inadequacy of such readings (Maritain 1943, 34–52; Mounier 1952, 67–89). Where intelligent exercise shrinks to efficiency calculus and human value is subjected to market sovereigns, persons are objects, not subjects, whose inherent dignity and an intended, transcendent telos languish unregarded (Francis 2015, §112, 81).

The technocratic model, moreover, brackets those contemplative and relational inclusions constitutive of a genuinely educative process: silence, wonder and interior development, persistent metaphysical pedagogy (De Souza 2016, 270–5). The prevailing rationality prizes measurement and absolves silent, erosive instrumentalized educational controls of significant moral and personal import. The result is a process instrumental in its outcome while narrative, dialogical, and sacramental in its vocation is foreclosed. Francis does not incite abandonment of scientific or technical advance; rather, he invites a re-humanization through enrollment of such advance in the kinetic service of persons, not institutions (Francis 2015, §112, 81)

Educational Vision Rooted in Integral Human Development

Francis's expansive conception of education receives its fullest elucidation in the 2019 *Global Compact on Education*, where he delineates a learning process designed to nurture "universal solidarity and a more welcoming society" (Francis 2019). Donato Pignotti has rightly remarked that through this compact the pontiff relocates the Catholic intellectual tradition beyond strictly instrumentalist logics toward "an education…of the person, for the person, and by the person" (Pignotti 2023, 60). Under this orientation, schooling emerges not merely as a conveyor of information, but as a "school of meaning" directed to the realization of authentic human dignity and the building of fraternal unity. Education is thus reconstituted as a relational and ethical praxis in which formation supplants the transmission of factual data and quantified competencies.

Francis's pedagogical anthropology presupposes that spiritual formation is not an auxiliary addition to curriculum and pedagogy, but a constitutive dimension. Catholic schooling is summoned to foster "interior life" and attunement to the transcendent, in striking contrast to prevailing paradigms that reduce learning to benchmarks of productivity and performance (Francis 2015, §47, 35–6). The insistence upon interiority reveals a wider way of viewing education as the holistic development of the person in mutual, dynamic, and sacramental relations with the divine, fellow human beings, and the cosmos.

Francis's vision of education exemplifies a distinctive extension of Ignatian pedagogy, its defining traits of discernment, reflection, and action interwoven into a continuous, transformational itinerary directed toward both societal responsibility and personal metanoia (International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education 1993, 14–22). Educators exercising this model regard themselves, therefore, not simply as teachers, but as deliberate companions capable of guiding learners from the margins of critical inquiry into the heart of a compassionate and courageous engagement with the pressing injustices of the present moment. This practice of acompañamiento echoes the methods characteristic of Francis's pastoral leadership, and is manifest in a commitment to encounter, gradual formation, and the cultivation of mercy as an alternative to imposed, perfunctory obedience.

Consequently, the present educational urgency is not to catalogue prescribed content, but to furnish a radically transformative, incisive riposte to the "throwaway culture" (Francis 2020, §30, 28–9) and acute social fragmentation pervasive within the current global horizon. Fratelli Tutti's call to a deliberate "culture of encounter" assigns a foundational place to pedagogy that, far from merely recognizing fault lines, actively deconstructs them so that genuine dialogue and co-inquiry may emerge across difference. Within this educational vision, the act of learning itself thus becomes a continuous exercise in openness, a cultivated practice of civic convergence that recognizes each person as a sibling whose intrinsic human dignity and common future are irrevocably intertwined across borders both natural and historical.

In conclusion, Francis's approach to education is not confined to impersonal technical instruction; rather, it is an enactment of theological and moral intention. Formative instruction is understood as a crucible producing persons who reason, discern, and choose in the interests of both self and the wider community, thereby cultivating virtuous citizenry and leadership bound to the continual construction of societies that are, in full depth, human, just, and integrally humane.

Philosophical Resonances and Dialogue

Francis's vision of education reveals a rich philosophical framework, drawing from Christian personalism and from critical pedagogies attentive to human worth, mutual relatedness, and practices of significant learning. Maritain, Mounier, and Wojtyła portray the person as intrinsically social, cued to the exercise of free will and drawn beyond the immanent – even the ethical ground of free coexistence and the transcendence that personalism so vigorously juxtaposes is a ground that animates Francis's understanding of integral human development, a vision that accords the human person no other horizon than the realm of vocation and

commitment. These figures press the Catholic humanism that provides the papal education of Francis with a doctrinal horizon that refracts curricular and methodological choices through the dual lens of epistemic hospitality and the expectation of moral fulfilment (Maritain 1943, 45–67; Mounier 1952, 78–95; Wojtyła 1979, 123–45).

Commenting explicitly, Graham McDonough asserts that within Francis's horizon dialogue ceases to be a technical heuristic. (McDonough 2014, 122). This interpretive layer re-anchors dialogue in the Catholic social tradition, re-reading that tradition so that it now re-empowers communities of learning instead of merely sanctifying them. Terence McLaughlin further indicates that the twin notion of fraternity as the pedagogical habit of reciprocal advance and the quasi-epistemic habit of dialogue now jointly respond to fragmentation and anxious individuation that have historically and sociologically labelled later-modern education (McLaughlin 2018, 154).

At the heart of the intertext that this essay opens is the ethics of care as articulated by both Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings, whose work has revolutionized understandings of moral education by, in Noddings's phrase, "defining the moral domain in the terms of what is in the context of the caring relation" (2013, 2–15). Anthropology-oriented surveys of care echo the conceptual contours of Francis of Rome's educational vision – notably the stress put upon situated responsiveness, the pivotal work of human dispositions in conversation, and the steady, cultivated gesture of empathy that grounds cultivated teaching and learning (Gilligan 1982, 17–23). The partnership between ethics of care and capabilities frameworks is thereby deepened, for the former furnishes instrumentally defined, exemplified pedagogical practices that enact the intersubjective horizons of growth to which Francis directs the instructor and learner alike. Noddings's designation of "natural caring" as an ineluctably moral attention, delineated as a "longing for goodness that arises out of the experience or memory of being cared for" (2013, 11–8), finds cohesive indices in Francis's repeated appeals for accompaniment and for a scholarly, moral, and spiritual formation that grows in reciprocity.

Moreover, Francis's moral thought exhibits a convincing, phenomenologically coherent kinship with Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach, particularly in the cognate demands of emotional nurturing, the developmental exercise of empathy, and the product of civic, ecologically attentive responsibility (Nussbaum 2011, 25–31; Walker and McLean 2013, 67–82). Within each educational discourse, it becomes clear that learning must move beyond the mere acquisition of technical skills. Education should foster the development of humane and socially responsible individuals who act with an awareness of their connection to others and the environment. Its ultimate aim is to form people capable of generosity, guided by loyalty to both human and ecological well-being, and committed to building just and flourishing communities for all.

Paulo Freire's liberation pedagogy participated as an orienting force within Jorge Mario Bergoglio's educational development, attaining particular salience during his episcopal tenure in Latin America, where Freirean models helped animate neo-Catechetical and pastoral initiatives. Freire's characterization of education as *conscientização* and dialogical praxis

(2000, 72–86) resonates with Bergoglio's treatment of the learner as an engaged moral subject who, through critical reflection, becomes an operative force for anthropological and social novelty, in contrast to the inert transmission of data. A mutual presupposition that learning must engage the existential whole of the subject structures both thinkers' output.

Modeling the voice of implicit interlocutor, Bergoglio resists the epoch's internal sceptics – writers such as Charles Taylor and Ivan Illich – whose diagnosis of hyper-rational and controlling structures wished to restore anthropological depth to the social imaginary (Taylor 2007, 715; Illich 1971, 7–11). Bergoglio rephrases their indictment within educational particulars, asserting that when curricula and methods subordinate themselves to narrowly instrumental calculation, the historical and inalienable educational function of transmitting the common inheritance and shaping the full human *capacité* – biological, cognitive, moral, and anagogical – dissipates, and all dimensions of personhood are left implicit, perfunctorily fulfilled at best.

Thus, the ontological and ethical core of Bergoglio's educational proposal situates itself within the anthropological personalism of Emmanuel Mounier; liberatory and critical curricular principles; the ethical literature of an attentive care; and the capabilities perspectives of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. The cumulative yield of these strands offers a coherent articulation of dignity as the threshold beyond which human formation becomes essential, rather than peripheral, to educational purpose, and a principled threshold against reigning technocratic reconceptualizations of the moral and the pedagogical.

Applications and Future Challenges

The enactment of Francis's educational vision within existing academic systems evokes both considerable possibilities and formidable structural impediments. The Pontiff invites Catholic educational bodies to transcend the goal of academic excellence and to pursue the "integral development of the human person," a development that unfolds in the spiritual, moral, social, and ecological dimensions (Hellwig 2016, 174). Such vision compels a profound remodelling of the entire somatic enterprise—fundamental alterations to the curriculum itself, profound reorientation of pedagogic strategies, and a systemic mutation of communal life—rather than the application of programme clichés that mask continuity.

Hellwig's commentary makes salient that the contemporary educator is to abandon the role of solitary dispenser of information and to assume the graced posture of "co-journeyer in a moral and spiritual quest" (Hellwig 2016, 174). Teachers and academic leaders are entrusted with the task of walk alongside learners in disclosing personal vocation, cultivating moral deliberation, and cultivating a revolutionary bond with the global polity, all animated by the twin impulses of mercy and justice. The difficulty of rendering these ideals actionable lies in the ossified architectonics and intractable ideological apparatus of many contemporary educational systems.

The Pontiff insists that Catholic educational institutions are summoned to withstand, with courage, the pervasive gravitational pull of societal homogenisation, and to embrace a prophetic identity that is, in effect, the charter of authentic "human becoming" (Francis 2019).

The prophetic imperative exacts a disciplined commitment to countercultural practices that prize human formation – affectionate, intellectual, and ethical – above the calculus of economic efficiencies, and that value relational development in lieu of the entropy of competition.

Educational practitioners are summoned, in the papal magisterium, to view themselves as ornately-present companions who walk with students toward personal maturity and ethical formation (Francis 2013, §169, 92–3). Such a companionship model necessarily requires the intentional cultivation of spaces devoted to dialogue, personal and communal reflection, and spiritual discernment – capacities deemed non-negotiable for building a citizenship suffused with Christian love and sensitively aware of the globe. Yet educational contexts that are heavily shaped by prescribed examinations, procedural bureaucracy, and evolving political ideologies operate upon layered infrastructures so stifling that the movement toward a holistic educational ethos is often curtailed or diluted.

Concurrently, the papal exhortation to establish a culture of encounter and to give premium attention to environmental sustainability raises the further expectation that curricula and institutional practices will weave together intercultural dialogue, peace education, and eco-responsibility (Francis 2019). Such a synthesis promises to reinforce central magisterial teaching, yet may, in particular contexts, encounter durable resistance from educational systems driven solely by external markets or by profit maximization.

Notwithstanding these obstacles, Pope Francis demands that ecclesiastical educational systems remain intransigently committed to serving as foci of both intellectual formation and spiritual awakening. This directive should not be understood as a call for literal imitation of established formulas, but rather as a process of adaptive reinterpretation, one that remains faithful to the Gospel while responding to the shifting currents of culture. Its purpose is to ensure that formation remains relevant and directed toward the integral and authentic growth of the human person.

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Theoretical Applications of Modern Apologetics: Internal and External Applications

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Abstract
The theological field of Christian apologetics has a long and storied history. Due in part to that history and recent interpretations and applications, the field has become detailed and complex to the point that many cannot understand or apply apologetics in the world today effectively. This paper proposes dividing the field into two specific areas, internal and external apologetics, for more clarity around education and application of the field and process. "Internal" would apply to individuals already on the "inside" of the Christian faith; while "external" would be applied to those who are not active Christians.

Keywords
Christian apologetics; theology; education; apologetics; modern apologetics; Christianity

Introduction

Theological discussions related to the source, meaning, and use of apologetics has continued nearly constantly since the time after Jesus' death. The field of apologetics in Christianity has changed over the years and expanded to almost have no meaning due to the inclusion of all possible aspects and applications of apologetics. Some consider it defense, others witness, others strictly theological. This research proposes working through the theological aspects to separate apologetics into portions for applications, particularly for educators: one branch and application towards non-believers for use with witnessing and defending the faith; and a second branch and application towards believers to help support the believers and prepare them to help witness to others and educate the people of the faith.

Original/Ancient Apologetic Applications and Styles

Some original apologetics will trace the origin of apologetics to the call in 1 Peter (Nicolson 2024, 97). This was a very general concept of apologetics, looking for Christians to be prepared to respond when questioned about their faith. 1 Peter 3:15 says, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:" (King James version). This call from Peter has driven a good portion of the concept of apologetics throughout the ages. It is a reasonable call,

and few Christians or theologians oppose that point: nearly all agree that people of faith should be able to give a reason for their faith. Apologetic educators and researchers will refer to this verse and call as their starting point for Christian apologetics.

Early Christian apologetics was focused around changing the world and describing Jesus Christ to the world that did not know Him (Jovanović 2024, 196). This was really an attempt to get the world to understand the idea and concept of Jesus Christ. No one before had ever come to earth, died, and been resurrected for the sins of the world. The concept was new and difficult to understand, so a good deal of focus was on finding ways to introduce these concepts to the world and the people of the world. While this concept is known and understood today, the audience of the world has changed substantially.

In the seventeenth century, most theologians had few questions related to the resurrection of Jesus (Allison 2021, 749). They did not feel the need to defend the event of the resurrection, as they simply accepted it. During the renaissance Humanism experienced a revival, which led to more questions around Christianity and the need for more logical defenses of the faith (Edgar and Oliphint 2011, 26). This created a need for apologetics related to discussions and witnessing for Christianity more than ever before.

Modern Apologetic Applications and Styles

Apologetics often differentiates between original apologetics from the first century and their focus in modern times based on church doctrine instead of application (Nicolson 2023, 4). This is where different denominations or different divisions of churches work to define what apologetics means to their people and their church. This is a customized meaning, focusing on the needs of that particular church or people group at the time. These sorts of differentiations work well for the churches and people for which they are specified, but they fail to provide a wider, more useful meaning and application of the theological aspects of apologetics.

Modern apologetics can be used as a method of witness for the church (Tomlin 2023, 518). While some church doctrines move in this direction, in general apologetics does not focus on using apologetics as a witness. Instead, many apologists often focus on just the defense of the faith, and one can only defend when they are attacked. While this can be an effective witness for the faith, this method of apologetics is seldom used intentionally to attempt to witness to unbelievers. There are exceptions, such as C. S. Lewis, Fulton Sheen, and others, that do work to use apologetics to follow the message of 1 Peter quite effectively. Still, as even many inside Christianity feel, apologetics may simply be an attempt to argue and “win” an argument.

Other modern apologetics focuses on Christ’s love to use as evidence for faith (Wetsah 2021, 464). Many modern churches focus primarily on Christ’s love for all that they do. While this is certainly a good and useful tactic, this may not be the most effective use of apologetics. When teaching anything related to the New Testament, Christ’s love will certainly be a part of that teaching. However, attempting to only use Christ’s love as apologetics is a method that does not make effective use of all the aspects available to the educator or Christian when speaking of apologetics and all that may be part of apologetics.

Arguments today around apologetics can focus on topics such as creationism (Talbot 2021, 80). While apologetics can work through issues from many angles, the discipline needs to have more focus and support rather than simply being a way to argue a point. Apologetics needs to expand beyond argumentation and into wider topics and support. As it expands, it also needs to narrow the focus. It can be difficult for an apologetics educator today to expand knowledge of the field and topic when only focused on single, narrow events or specific theology. At the same time, all aspects of theology can be incorporated into apologetics effectively if done with preparation and thought and consideration of the purpose of apologetics.

Modern apologists often focus on deep theological questions such as the existence of God when trying to defend the faith to non-believers (Kirby 2021, 410). Some advanced apologetics educational programs also spend a substantial amount of time on these types of questions to engage apologetics in the defense of theological questions that have deep and difficult answers. However, this should be just one aspect of apologetics, not the central focus. This application of apologetics can be useful for theologians who are working on academic research and talking to other theologians, but there is little application of this depth of apologetics to the individual Christian or to the non-believer. These are certainly very important questions that demand answers, but they remain only a small portion of the wide arena that is defined as apologetics and apologetic education today.

Apologetics in the modern world can often lean towards trying to answer if the worldview of the Christian is a rational position (Groothuis 2011, 55). This can often lead to discussions around rationality and philosophical questions around thinking and thought. There are times for discussions of the philosophy of religion, rationality, and human thinking; but there are also times for discussions around the truth of Christ and the goodness of God.

Potential Apologetic Applications and Styles

The 21st century has seen a rise in movements and theologies related to atheism (Dabetić 2021, 29). This helps illustrate the need for Christian evangelism and for training for these evangelists. This can be applied to those who are learning about their own faith, those who are witnessing in their communities, and those who move outward on mission trips to spread the Gospel to other people groups and other lands. But without clear preparation, and indeed, education in apologetics, these people will be faced with questions in the field that they cannot answer.

Apologetics can be, and has been, taught and used many ways in modern Christian society. Apologetics can be used to present the meaning of faith to the non-believer (Markus and van den Toren 2024, 81). This can be a strong witness for Christians who are engaged in such activity. While Christians can witness by using traditional methods such as “The Romans Road,” (a sequence of verses in Romans that are used to show the path to salvation) they should also be prepared to answer questions and defend their faith from attacks. When potential Christians ask questions, training in apologetics is the preparation that the Christian can have to engage fully in witnessing. Without this preparation and training, the witness may fall short.

While evangelical Christians today are often excited about trying to share the gospel and share their faith, they do not often see the practical relevance of theological apologetics (Johnson 2024, 168). This is certainly an issue, a barrier, and a topic that can be advanced and addressed by apologetic education. With apologetics being such a large field and area of study, it can be very difficult to attempt to address this with standard modern apologetics education today. If Christians cannot see the use, they will likely not accept the teaching education around apologetics.

The overall message of today's apologist is the Bible (Frame and Torres 2015, 42). This is often the same apparent message of the Christian missionary. However, today's typical Christian does not enter their mission field prepared with the specific knowledge of apologetics.

Apologetic Education: Internal and External Preparation

This paper proposes that apologetics education formally adjust and change to intentionally focus on two divisions of apologetics: internal and external. This intentional delineation and separation will allow educators to more effectively teach apologetics to receptive audiences. It will also allow Christian apologists to more clearly understand the uses and purposes around apologetics, no matter their role or part as a Christian.

The internal division of apologetics would be focused on Christians inside the church. This would focus on the uses and understandings of the faith and defending the faith for those who are already professing Christians. This type of teaching could be for Sunday School classes or other educational opportunities that involve the church and the people of the church. The primary focus here is around Christians understanding their own faith and being able to strengthen their own faith from the inside. The goal for this type of teaching and apologetics is to make Christians more confident in their own faith and understanding.

This process and education would not be simple catechesis, but a more complicated, detailed, and planned process to prepare believers to be able to more effectively discussion their faith. With this education, they could answer questions, defend the faith, and more effectively witness when they are asked about Christianity and the Bible. This would allow the Christian to expand, explore, and strength their own faith as well.

The external division of apologetics would be focused on those who are not professing Christians. While the teaching here will again be for Christians, the focus here is around educating Christians in how to defend their faith against questions and those who are outside the church. This would be useful for Christians who desire to witness and discuss their faith with others who do not understand it. These Christians would be trained how to answer questions and understand apologetics in ways that will allow them to increase education about the Christian church to those outside the church.

This definition of an internal apologetics process will serve to help fill a need that has not clearly been identified. Christians today often attend their churches, read their Bible, and sometimes attend Sunday school with the primary goal of increasing their relationship with God. There is nothing wrong with building that relationship, of course. But when Christians interact with non-Christians to explain their faith; their witness would be much stronger if they

were equipped with the knowledge of apologetics and how to apply that in instances where they are encountering non-Christians and witnessing to others.

Conclusion

Christian apologetics has a long history. It has been used in different ways over time and has expanded to a topic area that includes large amounts of information, history, styles, and applications. The topic area has become so large that educators and people who use, or should use, apologetics do not completely understand the uses and applications of the theological field. By dividing the topic field into separate areas, internal and external, educators and others can see the clear delineations of the topic and will be able to more effectively teach, use, and understand this complex area of knowledge.

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Churches as School Learning Spaces – Perspectives on Didactics of Sacred Spaces

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Abstract
The didactics of sacred spaces is an integrative approach within school-based religious education. It emphasizes churches as didactic learning environments that connect cognitive understanding with sensory and performative engagement. Through multisensory, participatory, and reflective methods, learners encounter the symbolic, aesthetic, and theological dimensions of sacred spaces without being missionized. It outlines principles such as slowing down, sensory experience, appropriation, and movement, underscoring the pedagogical value of learning in real church spaces. Ultimately, church space didactics fosters deeper religious literacy and sustainable, reflective learning.

Keywords
church space didactics; experiential learning; multisensory experience; education; performative learning; religious education; sacred spaces

1. Introduction

Churches are major tourist attractions in many cities. Hardly any visitors to Rome will skip St. Peter's Basilica, and few would pass by the Sagrada Família in Barcelona. The churches are part of our cultural heritage. They are appreciated as highlights during vacations, while at the same time, the number of people attending Sunday services is declining in many countries (for example, in Germany: cf. Statista 2025). Despite this trend, churches remain the central place of Christian faith, where congregations gather to celebrate liturgy.

Against this background, this article shows that visits to sacred spaces play a central role in the school context, but church space pedagogy concepts designed for church tours cannot simply be adopted wholesale. The first section outlines the necessity of a didactics of sacred spaces, discussing both the opportunities and limitations of learning *about* church buildings. It highlights the need for multiperspective learning *in* the church space in order to give all students, regardless of their background, equal opportunities to engage with the sacred environment. The aim is to provide access for those closely connected to the church, as well as for those who are distant from it or unbaptised, inviting them in without overwhelming them.

To achieve this, the didactics of sacred space require a performative approach, which is briefly presented. A short overview of key principles for educational work in church spaces complements these considerations before the article concludes with a short summary.

2. The Necessity of a Didactics of sacred spaces

Church space pedagogy initially emerged in extracurricular settings for voluntary visitors, often adults. Didactics of sacred spaces, on the other hand, aims at school learning: It prepares the church space as a learning location within the context of religious education and integrates it into the didactic structure of school learning processes.

In the school context, exploring church spaces usually takes place within the framework of a curriculum topic (e.g., church history, liturgy, symbols, sacraments). The goal is to deepen understanding in the classroom under the specific conditions of the church as a learning location. The focus is on thematically relevant aspects, not on a complete art-historical or touristic exploration. Churches are thus integrated into the curriculum as places of religious practice, individual piety, and cultural history. A church space didactics approach is therefore integrative: it links the intrinsic value of church space with the goals of religious education. It makes it clear that religion can also be experienced in and at very real places.

Church space didactics is rooted in denominational religious education but can also be implemented in a cross-denominational setting. Both homogeneous and heterogeneous learning groups are found in religious education classes, including students who are non-denominational or of other faiths. Therefore, a didactic concept is needed that does justice to different religious perspectives. The theological understanding of church space as a "sign and symbol of transcendent reality" (SC 122; cf. Rahner & Vorgrimler, 87; translation R.S.) must be taken into account in school pedagogy; rituals cannot simply be performed arbitrarily.

Church explorations must be carefully prepared: scheduling, travel arrangements, materials, and rules of conduct are just as important as coordinating with on-site personnel. Off-limits areas must be clearly established in advance. A central, thematically focused thread is essential for structuring the excursion and linking it to the lesson. A visit detached from the rest of the curriculum is counterproductive.

3. Opportunities and Limitations of Teaching about Church Spaces

The distance many learners have from religious experience makes it difficult to understand church spaces, which are often perceived as foreign because their own religion is no longer practiced. Therefore, church spaces can hardly be taught solely through cognitive means in the classroom. While virtual 3D tours offer visualization, they do not replace the sensory experience of space, sound, smell, and atmosphere. In a real church space, religion can be experienced as a lived practice; it is the emotional and social dimensions of exploration that are added.

Narrative, visual, and audiovisual media are valuable additions, creating cognitive anchors and preparing students for the church visit. Analogies to secular spaces – such as stadiums, concert halls, or train stations – can also help to explore the anthropological dimension of sacred places (cf. Brüll & Ittmann & Maschwitz & Stoppig, 13–6). These places also have behavioural norms, rehearsed rituals, and avenues of meaning. Such analogies acknowledge the human striving for meaning and community, but at the same time raise critical questions about the

Church: Why do many people experience a more intense sense of community there than in churches?

The didactic preparation should foster empathy for sacred spaces. Instead of moral appeals ("Now be quiet!"), biographical reflections are helpful, in which students describe their own "sacred places" (cf. Grünwaldt, 48–51). Rituals of transition increase mindfulness upon entering the church. Young people with little or no experience of church life, in particular, need real-life experiences to understand holiness. Digital or school worship experiences are insufficient, as they lack the connection between action and reflection. What is needed is a multisensory and reflective approach to the unfamiliar homeland of the Church.

Purely learning facts is insufficient. Only through action-oriented and performative forms of learning can the symbolic and emotional dimensions of religion be experienced (cf. Kaupp 2019, 391). Church spaces must therefore not only be observed, but experienced as places of liturgical action – in accordance with the Second Vatican Council's call for "full, conscious, and active participation" (SC14; cf. Rahner & Vorgrimler, 57). The task of didactics is to respectfully guide learners toward a participant perspective without overwhelming them. At the same time, space must remain to allow for distancing oneself from these forms. Non-Christian students should, in any case, primarily assume the role of observer.

4. Multiperspective Learning in Church Spaces

Church explorations should connect perception, interpretation, and understanding (cf. Rupp 2016; Neumann & Rösener). Experiential perception is a prerequisite for cognitive understanding. The excursion must evoke the sanctity of the space, for example, through threshold and closing rituals, but humour and lightness should also have their place. A healthy balance must be found here: neither reverential paralysis nor wild trampling through the church space is desirable. Observational and exploratory exercises – e.g., on acoustics, spatial proportions, or the effects of light – foster wonder at the architectural and symbolic dimensions of the church space. Through these exercises, students can gain an understanding of what it means to encounter God in a sacred space.

Individual approaches are particularly important, as learners bring diverse religious backgrounds. Multisensory perception (hearing, sight, smell, bodily sensation) enables subjective experiences that can be quite unsettling, such as when the skeleton of a martyr is displayed in a church. Open-ended tasks awaken curiosity and prevent students from being overwhelmed by predetermined answers. Teachers must be able to explain familiar religious symbols while simultaneously addressing ambivalences – for example, between art and piety, wealth and humility, or between theology and popular belief.

Church space didactics aims beyond immediate experience to foster sustainable religious learning. Students should become familiar with the basic elements of a house of worship and connect them with their own experiences. On-site experiences anchor cognitive content more effectively than purely material-based work when they are coupled and interconnected with sensory experiences. Combinations of individual exploration, performative elements (prayer,

song, movement), and reflection are particularly effective. Altar servers or choir members can contribute their experiential knowledge, while those of other faiths or no faith can, with their open-mindedness, stimulate reflection with surprising questions and perspectives. Such projects follow a multi-stage, church-space-based didactic model of preparation and introduction, arrival and engagement, exploration and experience, conclusion and letting go, and reflection and contextualization (cf. Mendl & Sitzberger 2023, 37ff.).

5. Performative Learning in Church Spaces

Performative religious education combines experience and reflection (cf. Mendl 2016; 2017; 2021). It aims to make religious practices understandable within the context of state-run religious education without lapsing into catechesis, which seems inappropriate in the school setting.

Objections to performative learning relate to the dangers of re-catechetization, clericalization, or an inadmissible liturgization of instruction. This criticism is refuted when performative phases are always linked with cognitive and reflective guidance. Learners decide for themselves whether they act as participants or observers. This freedom ensures a balance between religious experience and distance. Therefore, this should be consistently reinforced within the exploration, and students should become aware of whether this is a sacred space for them or not. Do I want to participate in the prayer or merely observe from the outside?

Rituals in the classroom exist within the tension between religious seriousness and didactic simulation. The crucial factor is the subjective meaning that learners ascribe to the actions. Teachers create the framework for seriously exploring religious forms of expression without claiming interpretive authority. Reflection enables distance and respect, even towards students who are not religious. Positive and negative religious freedom must be equally upheld. A balance must be struck between the sacred space and the seriousness of religion, as well as the autonomy and individual decisions of children and young people.

In denominational religious education, baptized students can be expected to engage with their own religion – but without any missionary pressure. Performative phases are offered, not obligatory. Those who are religiously distant or of other faiths must be offered an observational perspective.

A Performative Basic Model

Performative church space didactics embed experience in discourse and reflection, which is essential in the school setting. The goal is the understanding of religious practices, not their adoption by the students. Aesthetic, ritual, and emotional experiences should enable learners to understand religion as a cultural interpretation. A clear thematic framework, transparent preparation, and guided reflection are necessary.

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Performative Church Space Didactics

Thematic Embedding and Introduction
• Curriculum context, thematic focus, cognitive anchors
• Framework of the excursion (time, space, behavior)
• Opportunities for participation: attendance or observation

Ritual, prayer, liturgy in the church space
• Invitation to participate, open forms → subjective attribution of meaning
• Interim reflections → opportunity for distancing

Reflection and Continuation
• Subjective positioning (experience + reflect = learn)
• Exchange about perception and meaning
• Topic-specific follow-up work

Riegel & Kindermann (2012a & 2012b) showed that church space pedagogy excursions significantly increase interest in the subject matter. Combinations of individual exploration, performative elements, and reflection phases are most effective. Children who visited church spaces multiple times learned significantly more than those who only engaged with the topic through media. Performative learning methods thus promote both motivation and cognitive gain. The learners understand these explorations as an opportunity to experience the place as a religious and spiritual space, especially when they have the chance to try out practices themselves and then reflect on them.

6. Principles of a Didactics of sacred Spaces

From the preceding considerations, four central principles of church space didactics emerge (cf. Riegel & Kindermann 2012b, 177):

Slowing Down

Exploring church spaces emphasizes a slower pace of perception. “It is not much knowledge that satisfies the soul, but savoring things from within” (Ignatius of Loyola, 7). In contrast to traditional lessons with worksheets and a wealth of material to be conveyed, a direct encounter is staged, which presents the space as an auratic, sacred space. Therefore, threshold rituals are particularly important because they mark the transition from everyday mode to the perception of the sacred.

Sensory Experience

In addition to sight and hearing, smell, touch, body awareness, and spatial perception should also be addressed. Haptic experiences, in particular, awaken attention and reverence: Is it

permissible to touch the altar? To sit in the choir stalls? Such questions open up learning processes about the meaning of the sacred. However, in such sensory experiences, the intellect must not be neglected in the sense of a misguided holistic approach. Cognitive and multisensory learning must complement and enrich each other.

Appropriation

Church space education does not aim at art historical instruction, but rather at personal interpretation and appropriation. Guiding questions are: What do I perceive? What does it mean? What relevance does it have for me? Individual approaches – such as one's own favorite place – promote self-connection and understanding. The focus of church exploration should always follow a pre-defined and well-developed theme.

Movement

Learning in church space is thoroughly embodied. Through movement, space becomes tangible – walking, circling, listening. Physical and communal forms (e.g., procession, pilgrimage, liturgical gestures) connect perception, ritual, and reflection into an experience of church space that is not possible in the classroom – even with virtual tools.

7. Conclusion: The Enduring Value of the Exclusive

Exploring church spaces is not an everyday occurrence. School learning is embedded in a diverse network and in structural conditions. Leaving the school as a learning environment usually involves additional effort. This additional effort must be justified and accounted for to the students and to the school as a whole. The advantages of church space didactics are clear: it enables the development of diverse learning processes that cannot be implemented in the classroom but prove essential for religious learning. Therefore, it should continue to be given sufficient space in school curricula.

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The Influence of Value Orientation on the Level of Teacher Burnout

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Abstract
The article highlights the influence of teachers' values and personal beliefs on their resilience to burnout syndrome. It points out that loss of idealism and enthusiasm for work, accompanied by exhaustion, cynicism, and decreased motivation, is common among teachers who enter the profession with idealistic and altruistic values, a deep sense of mission, a desire to help children, and a desire to change society for the better. If the school environment supports these values and creates a supportive climate, this can act as a protective factor.

Keywords
character; value orientation; resilience; risk values; teacher burnout; school support; education; teaching; personality; profession; goals of education; philosophy of education

Introduction

Research in Norway, for example, has shown that when teachers' values align with those of the school, teachers feel more part of the collective, are happier at work and experience less emotional exhaustion (Maslach & Jackson 2013, 227–51). On the other hand, a lack of alignment between teachers' personal values and the practices or goals of the institution is one of the most significant predictors of burnout, particularly with the development of depersonalisation and cynical attitudes, and subsequently with considering leaving the education sector. Recent studies of university teachers have even suggested that teachers who strongly identify with their school's values, may experience moral distress (a kind of "moral injury") in crisis situations, which can lead to burnout. For example, during the pandemic, teachers had to balance earlier demands for academic results with empathy for students. This led to a painful conflict of values for some (Skaalvik & Skaalvik 2011, 68–77).

Overall, the ability to realise one's professional ideals and values in practice acts as a significant resilience factor – a personal value system can function as an effective regulator of a teacher's psychological state in stressful situations. Conversely, persistent disagreement between a teacher's values and the reality of the school environment creates conditions for gradual exhaustion and loss of meaning in work.

Risk values: idealism, need for recognition

Some values and personality traits can make teachers more vulnerable to burnout. Strong idealism – namely, high expectations and a desire to fulfil one's mission perfectly – can lead to frustration if the reality of school life differs from these ideals. Studies show that highly idealistic teachers are much more likely to leave the profession. It is precisely those who are deeply committed to serving students who are most at odds with conditions that prevent them from doing what they themselves consider best for their students (Harland, Journell, Campbell & Kaplan 2020, 301–22).

A classic example is the American National Teacher Corps programme of the 1960s – enthusiastic university graduates filled with idealism wanted to "save" disadvantaged children, but over 95% of them left teaching within five years due to the clash with the harsh reality of school bureaucracy. Idealism and altruism can therefore be a double-edged sword: they provide teachers with internal motivation and meaning, but if their ideals are not met, they are at risk of burnout from chronic disappointment (Peterson 2011, 18–27).

Similarly, the need for recognition and appreciation can increase susceptibility to burnout. Teachers who strongly desire social respect and feedback often suffer in environments where their efforts are taken for granted and there is a lack of significant recognition. One of the most frequently mentioned stressors is the feeling of insufficient recognition and low social status of teachers. For example, a qualitative study of teachers identified that, alongside objective stressors (workload, disciplinary issues, etc.), teachers repeatedly cited a lack of recognition from management and society, or limited involvement in decision-making, as factors contributing to their burnout. In other words, if a teacher values respect for their work and professional autonomy, but encounters the opposite, it creates fertile ground for chronic stress (Wilson, & Thompson 2019, 384–96).

Further research suggests that certain personality traits – for example, teachers with a 'hero complex', who are self-sacrificing and set unrealistically high standards for themselves – may be more prone to burnout. It is therefore important for teachers to find a balance between their ideals and taking care of their own mental health (Maslach & Jackson 2013, 227–51).

Value conflicts in practice: case studies of teachers

In the stories of teachers, conflicts of values often emerge as a trigger for burnout or leaving the education sector. Education philosopher Doris Santoro (2015, 14–6) distinguishes classic burnout from a phenomenon she calls the demoralisation of teachers – this occurs when a teacher wants to do a "good job" in line with their moral convictions, but systemic conditions prevent them from doing so. Teachers then experience not only exhaustion, but also deep disappointment at being unable to teach as they believe to be right and meaningful. Many experienced teachers describe that it is not the children or teaching that exhausts them, but rather the dilemmas and pressures they face, such as when school policy, bureaucratic regulations or overload prevent them from fulfilling their values, such as fair treatment of every student, creative teaching, or helping underperforming children (Peterson 2023, 18–27).

When a teacher's work is in conflict with their conscience and values, the "moral reward" of the profession disappears and a state of moral exhaustion sets in, which authors describe as demoralisation (Smith 2021, 125–37). This can manifest itself in a similar way to burnout (apathy, cynicism, resignation), but the cause lies in a value conflict, not just personal resilience failure (Santoro 2018, 14–6).

Case studies of teachers in different types of schools illustrate these conflicts. For example, a primary school teacher for whom the key value is helping each child according to their needs may find it difficult to cope when, due to overcrowded classrooms and pressure to fulfil the curriculum, he lacks the capacity to dedicate himself to weaker students, he experiences a conflict between the value of altruism and reality, which leads to frustration and gradual burnout (Wilson & Thompson 2019, 384–96).

Among secondary school teachers, there is often a conflict between the value of expertise and the education of students vs. pressure to achieve good test results and strong admission statistics. Teachers may feel that they are merely "preparing students for tests" rather than providing a real education, which undermines the purpose of their work. In qualitative interviews, teachers repeatedly mention a lack of autonomy (the ability to implement their own pedagogical approach) and weak support for collegiality as factors that contribute to their dissatisfaction.

Burnout among teachers: statistics

Statistical data confirms that burnout is a widespread problem across different levels of education and countries. For example, in the Czech context, studies show that around a fifth of teachers exhibit signs of burnout and up to 65% are at risk of developing it in the future. This means that almost two-thirds of teachers experience high levels of stress and exhaustion, which can lead to burnout if the situation does not improve. Similar figures emerge in data on the departure of novice teachers – in some studies, turnover exceeds 50–60%. This suggests that many of them are leaving the profession due to burnout or dissatisfaction with their values. Study examined resilience to burnout in relation to experience and school type, and found that teachers in secondary schools had slightly higher burnout scores than teachers in primary schools (Kollerová, Květon & Zábrodská, et al 2023, 885–902).

Conclusion

The overview of studies shows a close connection between teachers' value hierarchy and burnout. Teachers are strongly motivated by values such as the meaning of work, helping others, social contribution and self-realisation. These values can act as a protective shield – they give work meaning, increase engagement and help overcome difficulties. However, they can also be a potential source of vulnerability if they are not in line with the reality of the school system. Ideals that run into obstacles can turn into frustration and long-term stress.

The above empirical studies in different countries confirm that a discrepancy between a teacher's personal values and the conditions for their fulfilment is one of the key factors in

burnout. On the other hand, the ability to realise one's values – to feel meaningful, see results in students, gain recognition and autonomy – acts as a prevention of burnout. Individual value priorities also come into play: teachers with extremely idealistic or perfectionist tendencies need support to avoid burnout, while those with a balanced value framework and self-care are more resilient.

Several recommendations for practice can be derived from this. Schools should openly discuss the values and goals of education at their workplace – as research suggests, clear definition and sharing of values at school level can strengthen value consonance and reduce the risk of teacher burnout. It is also important to give teachers feedback and recognition for their work, so they feel that their efforts are worthwhile (this will prevent a sense of futility in those who strongly desire professional recognition). The management should recognise warning signs of value conflicts – for example, if a teacher complains that they have to do things against their convictions, this could lead to burnout or resignation if nothing changes. Programmes supporting teachers' mental health (mindfulness, supervision) can help teachers to better manage stress, but it is equally important to create an environment where teachers do not have to compromise their values.

Teachers who can remain true to their "mission" while setting healthy boundaries have the best chance of working in education long-term without burning out. The aim is therefore to align teachers' values with those of the school and to promote a culture that takes human limitations into account – only in this way can we combat burnout in this demanding and valuable profession.

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Pedagogical Translanguaging as a Bridge of Return: Supporting Children of Re-Emigrant Families in Polish Schools

Anna Sarbiewska

Abstract
The growing return of Polish citizens from Western European countries, increased by Brexit and steady economic growth in Poland, has, for some years, been transforming the demographic and linguistic condition of Polish schools. School children of re-emigrant families, who are frequently bilingual and bicultural, experience educational difficulties entering Polish schools. Based on current research on and theoretical framework of pedagogical translanguaging, this article claims that recognition of students' multilingual competencies can be a pedagogical answer to such learning difficulties. Pedagogical translanguaging, a thoughtful practice that activates the whole learner's linguistic repertoire, provides individualization, cognitive flexibility, and facilitates education. The article outlines the philosophical implications for rehumanizing education in an era of global mobility and presents practical applications within the Polish curriculum.

Keywords
re-emigration; bilingualism; pedagogical translanguaging; education; philosophy of education; inclusion; personalistic pedagogy; Polish system of education

Introduction: Return Migration and Educational Change in Poland

Since 2004, the year Poland joined the European Union, many Polish citizens have been leaving the country and settling in Western states. For a couple of years now, we have witnessed a steady process of return migration[1] as a result of, i.e. Poland's economic development (Polish Observer 2024). According to the German statistics office (Statistisches Bundesamt [Destatis] 2025), for the first time in 2024, the number of Poles returning from Germany (90,807) exceeded the number leaving (82,082). As Fihel et al. (2023) predict, Poland is projected to transition from net sender to net receiver around 2030–2034. This situation expends the topic

[1] According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM 2019), return migration refers to "the movement of a person returning to his or her country of origin after spending time abroad." In Polish educational studies, the term re-emigrant (reemigrant) is used interchangeably to denote returning citizens and their family members (Słowik 2020; Jędryszek-Geisler 2024).

of financial capital flow, enrichment of diverse experiences and competencies among citizens but also complex educational challenges. Children of re-emigrants often re-enter Polish schools after years of studying abroad, usually in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, or other EU countries. Their linguistic repertoires are plural, often dominated by English or German, and their cultural frameworks have been shaped by other educational systems (Jędryszek-Geisler 2024; Słowik 2020). Therefore, Polish schools are becoming multilingual and multicultural spaces, unfortunately still without adequate systemic preparation to this evolving situation.

Comparable educational challenges are met in Southern Europe, where the return of emigrant families from Western countries has changed school demographics (Italy, Portugal, Spain). Studies in Germany and the Netherlands (Veerman et al. 2025) similarly demonstrate that translanguaging-based pedagogies help multilingual learners in mainstream classrooms. Therefore, the Polish case represents part of a wider European pattern of re-integration through multilingual education.

This phenomenon cannot be fully understood without recognizing its wider pedagogical and social ranges. This type of return migration involves not only linguistic and didactic concerns, but also psychological adjustment, economic reintegration, and the political responsibility of educational systems to foster inclusion. Consequently, the issue of re-emigrant education requires an interdisciplinary perspective joining philosophy, pedagogy, and social policy. While this article focuses primarily on Polish context, the reflections presented here resonate with challenges shared across Europe, where schools increasingly educate children of return migration.

Although children returning to Poland are not separated from their parents, they still face emotional discontinuity i.e. in the area of social, linguistic, cultural and emotional gap. In her narrative study 'It was better in London,' Aneta Słowik (2020) documented the re-rooting process of Polish families returning from the United Kingdom. Parents frequently describe their children's struggles in Polish schools, connected with difficulties with understanding specific concepts presented at lessons or reading and writing in the Polish language. The children, on the other hand, describe the feeling of undergoing an identity crisis – 'Who am I here?' – and longing for the familiar environment of their previous schools abroad. The research conducted by Jędryszek-Geisler (2024) supports these voices, proving that the main difficulties faced by returning learners include limited academic Polish, emotional distress, and insufficient institutional support.

To shed further light on this issue, it is pertinent to note that the traditional approach prevailing in the Polish system of education responds to linguistic diversity with assimilation- the goal is to make the re-emigrant student 'fully Polish' as quickly as possible. Official documents, such as subject-specific curricula and the core curriculum itself (both for primary and secondary education), abound with regulations and recommendations that are consistent only with monolingual teaching. This approach may have functioned well even a few years ago, but in the current situation of growing returns of families with school-age children, it is becoming insufficient. Moreover, this monolingual approach not only disregards linguistic equity, but

also disables the use of student's understanding of crucial terms and accumulated subject knowledge in a foreign language. In contrast, research in multilingual education highlights that bilingualism enhances metacognition, creativity, and problem-solving (García & Li Wei 2014). Recognizing the bilingual repertoire of re-emigrant students as a pedagogical asset means the need to transform classroom discourse.

Pedagogical Translanguaging: Concept and Application

The problems described above with bilingual students are nothing new. Going back to the beginnings, the concept of pedagogical translanguaging originated in the Welsh bilingual context (Cen Williams 1994) and has been furthered among others by García, Li Wei. This approach to education refers to the planned integration of all learner's languages in the learning process. For re-emigrant students, translanguaging may serve several functions: cognitive, affective, social, and cultural. Translanguaging is not random code-switching but a structured pedagogy that purposefully integrates all learner's linguistic resources in order to support comprehension and academic achievement. It enables re-emigrant students to bridge their home and school languages in meaningful, empowering ways.

There are some Ministerial advances in thinking about teaching in multilingual classroom i.e. the IBE-PIB (2024) has been working on "Activities supporting educational accessibility" including a project "Accessible School for All" which addresses pupils with migration experience and language development support. Furthermore, the new curriculum project on modern foreign language education (IBE-PIB 2025) emphasizes intercultural competence and communication. Nevertheless, most educational documents still conceptualize Polish and foreign languages as distinct domains. Integrating translanguaging seems to be a far-away transformation requiring systemic reinterpretation and teacher awareness. To support bilingual learners effectively the focus should be directed towards teacher education (further training of in-service teachers and academic training of up-coming teachers), collaborative teaching, and evidence-based teaching approach.

Viewed through the lens of pedagogical personalism promoted by Pope John Paul II, translanguaging transcends its methodological dimension to become a deeply humanistic and philosophical act of education. Personalism, as articulated in The Acting Person (Osoba i czyn; Wojtyła 1969) and in later papal writings, affirms that the human person is the subject – never merely the object – of education, summoned to truth, closeness, and self-realisation through free and responsible action (John Paul II 1979, 1998). In this context, the learner's linguistic identity is not marginal but fundamental of personhood. Translanguaging, therefore, has a chance to serve as a genuine personalist pedagogy of encounter and presence, one that respects the dignity and wholeness of learners by welcoming all their linguistic resources into the process of meaning-making. If teachers allow re-emigrant students to draw upon their full linguistic repertoires, they will endorse what John Paul II described as the "law of the gift" – the pedagogical expression of love and affirmation that enables the person to fully become themselves in relation to others. Thus, translanguaging has the potential to function in Polish schools simultaneously as an act of educational care, that fosters belonging, and as

a philosophical embodiment of personalist anthropology, in which language creates the centre of the human person's search for truth, meaning, and community. The presence of pedagogical translanguaging in the classroom is capable of carrying a deep ethical consequence, affirming the student as linguistic being-in-relation – someone whose identity is constituted through language and presence. Translanguaging has the opportunity to become a pedagogy of return, recognising the student's migration story as a foundation of wisdom and enrichment rather than trauma.

Classroom Implications: From Philosophy to Practice

The translation of personalist philosophy into educational practice can take modest yet profoundly transformative actions. In everyday classroom practice, translanguaging can take the form of peer-translation tasks, where bilingual students collaboratively reconstruct Polish texts in English and vice versa (Daniel & Pacheco, 2015). Learners may keep translanguaging notebooks (Busse et al. 2020) that record key vocabulary and conceptual connections across both languages, and create bilingual "identity texts" (Kapoyannis, 2019) expressing their stories of migration. Moreover, translanguaging may be realised through bilingual learning spaces, where students can access and compare materials in multiple languages. Such practices operationalise the personalist and inclusive dimension of translanguaging, grounding it in everyday experiences of learners and teachers.

Return migration is not a simple reversal of emigration – it is a complex process of re-rooting that involves renegotiating identity, memory, and belonging. For children, this transition clarifies most intensely in the classroom, where linguistic and cultural worlds intersect. Within this context, pedagogical translanguaging emerges as a bridge that connects past and present, home and host, the familiar and the new. By acknowledging all the languages that create a learner's experience, Polish schools can transform the experience of re-emigration from the feeling of discontinuity and loss into an opportunity for excitement and integration. Translanguaging perceives bilingualism not as a short-term coping mechanism but as a lasting expression of belonging and care – a way of feeling at home across languages and cultures. In this sense, it resonates with the vision of pedagogical personalism inspired by Pope John Paul II, who understood education as the formation of persons capable of dialogue, responsibility, and communion. Ultimately, translanguaging emerges not only as a pedagogical bridge but also as a goal, directing Polish schools toward communities that are more inclusive, compassionate, and intellectually aware in this new era of migration and return. The Polish example may serve as a research laboratory for rethinking multilingual education in Europe shaped by mobility and return. Translanguaging, anchored in personalistic pedagogy, offers not only a methodological innovation but also a philosophical response to the moral and social obligation of education in times of global mobility.

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The Question of Meaning as a Path to Transformation. Part 1 An Inspiring Image

Roland Urbain

Abstract
The article contributes to the discussion about the role of the question of meaning in education. Its author advocates a form of teaching that, beyond the acquisition of competencies, also emphasises the possibilities for students' inner transformation and individuation. This article is the first part of a series of three texts. In it, the author formulates the question of meaning based on an image that a teacher can use in class. Through this image, he describes his own experience with the question of meaning, which has accompanied him throughout his life. This personal narrative encourages students to identify their own encounters with the question of meaning.

Keywords
question of meaning; education; human development; philosophy of education; learning; teaching; philosophy; transformation

Introduction

A colleague once told me that we don't teach for our own pleasure. He was absolutely right, but I didn't take his remark to heart. Of course, learners must acquire the necessary skills through the teacher's instruction, whether the teacher likes it or not. So, I worked with students to help them discover concepts and tools that would be useful in their profession. Accompanying them in their discoveries and sharing their joy at mastering subjects and being able to apply them gave me a great deal of satisfaction. It was in tackling the material devoted to the question of meaning that I found pure pleasure in teaching. From then on, I always made sure to include this segment of the curriculum in the syllabi for the courses I was responsible for. You could say, I made it almost a prerequisite for the subjects that followed. In doing so, I shared my colleague's opinion while enjoying myself. It is this extra effort that I put into my teaching that I will modestly recount in the following text.

I will divide my remarks into three distinct parts, which will be presented separately: first, the formulation of the question of meaning based on an inspiring image that had a profound impact on me; second, the identifying of useful tools for enabling us to ask this question; and finally, exploring how the question of meaning relates to the transformation of the human person engaged in the process of individuation.

What I present in the first two parts of my discussion is the way in which I addressed the question of meaning in my teaching practice, and how I applied it in a specific environment where the concepts studied by my students were primarily technical. I will conclude with an original approach that I did not teach systematically, but on which I will expand in the third part of the article.

I want to thank Professor Blascikova for giving me the opportunity to write this new article. It is an opportunity for me to, once again, return to what I consider to be an essential question for human beings: the question of 'Why'.

The students enrolled in a technical course with whom I worked had already been exposed to philosophy, but had not explored it in depth. Drawing from my own journey as a modest craftsman of philosophy, I shared with them a question that remains essential to me: who am I, where am I going, how do I accept the life I have been given, and by what ways do I consent to it?

Here, I present the point of view I have adopted in my teaching practice: that of approaching concepts and applying them to the everyday life of the students I have worked with.

An inspiring image

Picture source: Plantu (Plantureux, Jean). 1980. "Naissance." In *Plantu. Dessins de presse*. Le Monde Éditions.

A little man who invites reflection

It would not be surprising if, while talking about me, my former students would draw parallels between the little man scratching his head and hatching out of his shell and me.

How I wish I had commented on that superb drawing by Plantu (1980)! I would examine it closely, through the reactions of my listeners and my own observations: we would discuss the shell, symbolising a cocoon conducive to the formation of a new being, but also a gilded prison that confines and prevents one from expanding their wings and being enabled to grow and become a mature, free and responsible person; we pointed out that here the little man is breaking out of the shell and beginning to emerge: he is only halfway out, which suggests that he is taking his freedom cautiously, maintaining a link with what he knows and finds reassuring; the drawing suggests that the little man is venturing into an unknown world that surprises him, that he does not know, as evidenced by the fact that he is scratching his head. Some pointed out that the questioning of this little man scratching his head must be an integral part of his existence, he himself being, through the shell, the question mark's dot. Many suggested that the question mark should be projected alongside the light that illuminated it, reminding the little man not to forget to question himself once he frees himself of his shell and takes his first steps, the shadow cast by the light. These same students said they were certain that the little man would follow the path of the light, his nose leaving no doubt about the direction he would take. Finally, some highlighted the darkness covering parts of the question mark, indicating that the light enables the dark sides, which also invited concern, as offered by the drawing. More anecdotal were the remarks of some who went as far as to propose that the cracks in the shell allude to the ups and downs of life.

This drawing has accompanied me for years, and each time I look at it, it reveals something new or makes me aware of a new way to question myself.

A little man with a strong presence

I have always identified with this character, half-emerged from his shell. He is leaving one world to discover another, clearly wondering what is happening and where he is going. This is an entirely natural attitude, like looking around a new home, walking around a new neighbourhood to get your bearings, or finding your place in a new context.

The question 'why' is an expression of curiosity that allows us to understand our environment, find our place in it, and evolve within it. Understanding and evaluating through a 'why' that sometimes suggests that things could be different from what we once assumed them to be. However, some people go through life without really questioning it: they tend to just accept what happens to them, functioning in a way that provides them with a daily life that is more or less secure, more or less suited to their needs, more or less tailored to them. They live their daily lives without taking a step back to question and evaluate. This is linked to a way of life inherited from education, training, social context, or, more painfully, precariousness.

Thus, I have been known to generations of students as the friend of that little guy scratching his head. I liked him immediately because he was close to me and to many others, sharing this human propensity to ask questions.
I have always explained to students that the question 'why' is naturally embedded in everyday human life as a way of seeking to know and understand: where does it come from, where is it going, and how is it going?
When the questioning investigates the person I am, it takes on another dimension: metaphysics takes over, questioning the foundations to the point of asking about 'being' as such: 'Why is there something rather than nothing?'
My engineering students were particularly interested in this shift in questioning: From 'What is it?' when faced with a broken engine – which allows us to focus our investigations on isolating the causes and acting on them, without having to dismantle the engine every time to see what is going on inside – to 'Why do I exist?', 'Why am I living?' and, following on from these, depending on the topics covered (Who, What, Where, How, How much, Why), these questions are often asked to find out the origin 'Why?' and to focus on the purpose 'What for?'.
I will come back to this later in the last part of this article. But before leaving this image that has inspired me for a long time, it is important to explain, based on anecdotes from my own experience, when I recognised the importance of the 'why' for myself.

A little man meets a little child

I was undoubtedly predisposed to questioning, and my father was an engineer who stimulated me and opened my mind to many things during the many walks we took together until the day before he died. It was my father's engineering background that made me interested, from an early age, in the elements that make up an object and the relationships between them, what makes them function. My students often heard me talk about constituent elements and operating mechanisms (Amiguet & Julier 1996). I was interested, I asked questions, I wanted to see and understand. Taking objects apart and putting them back together again were activities that fascinated me. I, Roland, questioned everything, seeking to understand, to such an extent that my grandmother called me 'Why? What?'.

The following two anecdotes show that this propensity for questioning has been present in me since my earliest childhood.

My first memory indicates that I began to question metaphysically incredibly early on. When it was time to go to sleep, Dad would make the sign of the cross on my forehead, and Mum would put me to bed, reciting two prayers with me: the first addressed to Mary, mother of Jesus, the "Hail Mary"; and the second addressed to Jesus' father, the "Our Father". I remember in great detail sinking into my bed one evening after Mum left the room and wondering about the possibility of having two dads: my dad, who was in the living room and had just blessed me and wished me good night, and another dad, whom I addressed with Mum when I said 'Our

Father' and who was in heaven. I tortured my child's mind until I cried, wondering how my other dad, whom I had never seen, could fly in the sky as the birds do.
That was the beginning of my metaphysical questioning, which has never left me since. I got to know my other Dad and met Him through an intimate heart-to-heart relationship. I was also able to tell the difference between the sky of the birds and the Heaven of Jesus. Philosophy and theology helped me formulate the question of being, as such, in a more developed way. The starting point is this experience from my early childhood. What followed was simply an unfolding of what was contained in that beginning.

The second memory takes me back to a walk with my father. It was a walk we took regularly, following a path behind some houses to the end, where it wound down to a marshalling yard. We would stop at the first bend in the sloping path and look out over the yard. We would stand there for ages, gawping at the locomotives going back and forth, changing tracks, uncoupling carriages from one train and attaching them to another. These terraced tracks fascinated me. I would stand there for long minutes, motionless, watching the multiple movements. I was spellbound.
This anecdote from my early childhood makes me realise today that my mind functioned analytically from a very early age and that my fascination with the movements on a set of terraced rails is similar to the way my brain works while 'Mind Mapping': The arrangement of the railway yard tracks resembles the graphic technique of 'mind mapping,' which organizes ideas, information, or tasks around a central concept, with branching structures similar to a tree, mirroring the way the brain functions. In the wake of this classic definition, easily found on the internet, I think back to my grandmother's fruit trees, also arranged in rows against the garden wall, whose branches are reminiscent of the tracks at the marshalling yard of my childhood.
When faced with a question or problem to solve, my brain explores the structured map line by line, branch by branch.

A small child in a supportive environment

I realise how privileged I was to live in a stimulating environment, opening my mind to a wealth of things, taking an interest in my childhood, and mobilising a wealth of resources to develop it. This, however, is not always the case, as Michel Onfray denounces vigorously. The author first points out that childhood is the ideal time for questioning: "A propensity to question, to ask why, how, in what way. Without being prompted, independently of any social conditioning – and even often in spite of it, against it... children take nothing at face value if they do not understand the sequence and causality." (Onfray 2004, 109–10). The author then explains that not everyone nurtures this capacity to question in the same way. Some even lose it: "Why do they then lose this sublime propensity? Because the family and the school, both complicit in this murder, do everything necessary to prevent, disappoint, and prohibit this questioning approach, replacing it either with pure and simple apathetic renunciation or by force-feeding them answers to questions they do not ask themselves. Why think for oneself when one can obey for others?" (Onfray 2004, 111–2).

The child in me was spared and able to develop and unfold its full potential. It would be interesting, but would go far beyond the scope of this article, to examine the places where Michel Onfray refers to social conditioning. The author's condemnation is still relevant in specific contexts. It must be said, however, that new, active, and cross-disciplinary teaching methods are being implemented to encourage learners' creativity and help them fulfil their respective potential. This certainly deserves further discussion. I am merely touching on the subject here.

A question mark that won't go away

The question of 'meaning' is therefore unavoidable for me. I use and abuse it at will, applying it to everyday life and to what might lie beyond: the question of being as a being, the question of God, if He exists. I have never doubted it. In this vein, very often, if not every day, I think about my death, which directs my questioning in two directions: the question of meaning applied to the question of God; and, consequently, the question of my life and my existence in everyday life in relation to their 'future'. I have developed these questions in greater depth elsewhere (Urbain 2013 et 2022).

Conclusion

The little man coming out of his shell is very familiar to me. He accompanies me every day.
The question of meaning, that he seems to be asking as he scratches his head, has been with me since my early childhood. It comes naturally to me. It allows me to understand, to identify, the elements of a system, a group, a situation, and to see the relationships they establish and maintain with each other. It allows me to cope with the ups and downs of my existence. It allows me to persevere when it comes to living for the sake of living. It allows me to nurture my hope and understand the realities of the hereafter. It takes its rightful place in the transformations that gradually make me who I am. It will accompany me, I hope, until the moment when the great scythe reaps me. For that I wish, and should that happen, mission accomplished. In the second part of this article, which will be published at a later date, I will briefly present the tools used with my technical higher education students to formulate the question at hand.
To be continued in the next issue.

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